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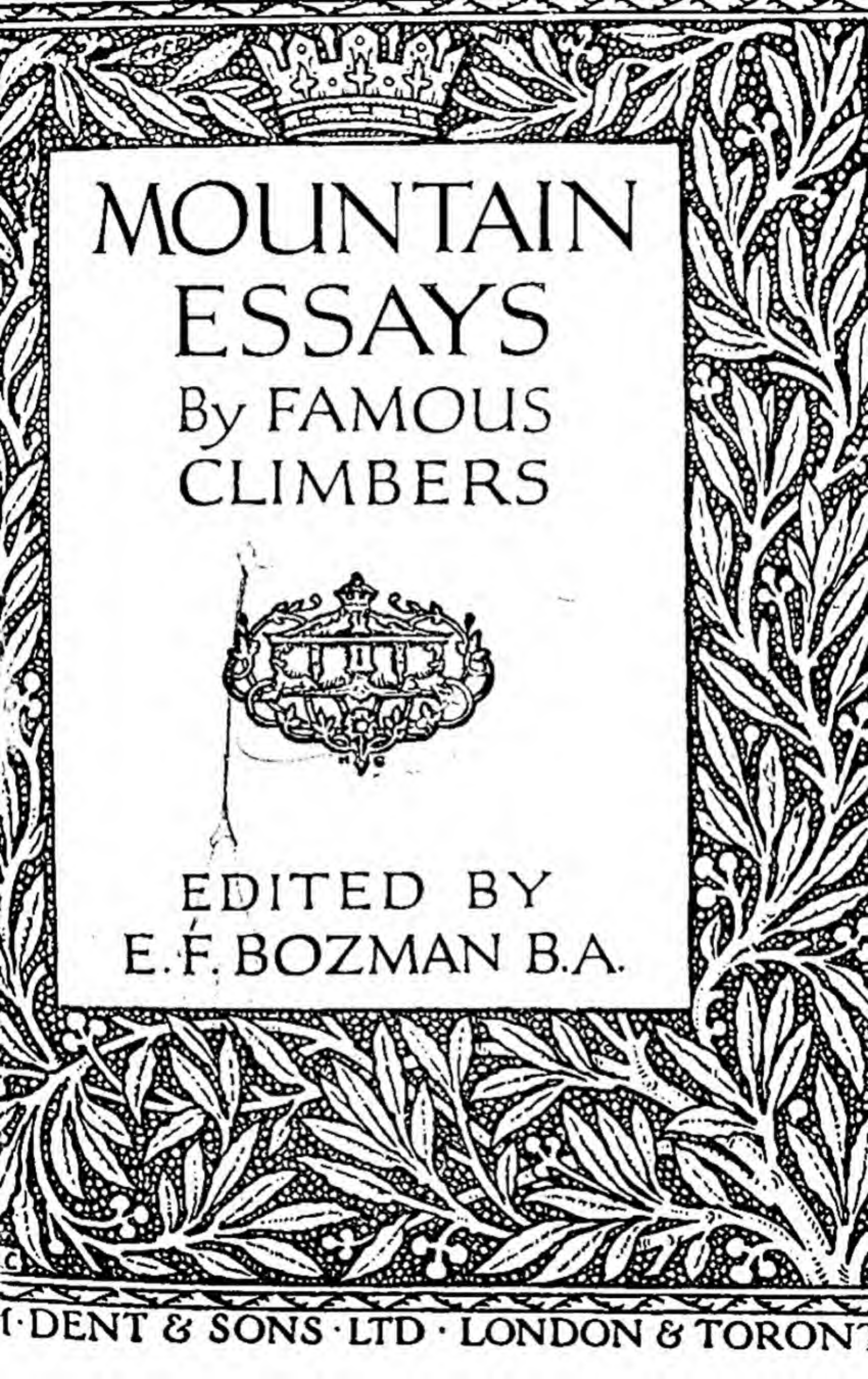
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MOUNTAIN ESSAYS

By FAMOUS
CLIMBERS



EDITED BY
E. F. BOZMAN B.A.

6/12/22

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NOTE

I wish to acknowledge my special indebtedness through Mr. Sydney Spencer to the Alpine Club for permission to reprint essays from the *Alpine Journal*, and for the use of the Alpine Club library; also to Mr. Geoffrey Winthrop Young and Messrs. Methuen and Co. Ltd. for two extracts from *On High Hills*, to Mrs. Whymper for the *Ascent and Descent of the Matterhorn* by Edward Whymper, to Sir Martin Conway and Messrs. Constable Co. Ltd. for *An Ascent of Monte Rosa*, to Messrs. Ernest Benn Ltd. for *The Furggen Ridge* by A. F. Mummery, to Mr. N. E. Odell for *The Last Climb*, to the Climber's Club for the *First Ascent of the East Buttress of Lliwedd*, by J. M. Archer Thomson, and to Mr. F. S. Smythe and Messrs. Victor Gollancz Ltd. for the chapter *Kamet Conquered*. I am grateful to S. B. and to Mr. H. R. C. Carr for assistance in reading the proofs, and to Mr. G. N. Pocock for advice and suggestions.

I have attempted by means of short introductory notes to each essay to "place" the climbs described, and a glossary (p. 10) at the beginning of the text explains technical terms. Reference to a map of Switzerland will add to the interest of some of the accounts; at the end of the volume is a short list of books of general rather than technical interest, suggested for those who wish to read more about the subject.

GLOSSARY

Aiguille, a needle-shaped peak, of rock or snow-covered rock.

Alpenstock, an iron-shod staff.

Arête, a ridge, usually in climbing one of the main supporting ridges of a peak.

Belay, a projection of rock, round which the rope can be hitched. By the skilful use of the rope on "belays" a leader can secure his party as long as one only is moving at a given time; neither rope nor belays serve to secure the leader, who must not make a mistake; thus the strength of a climbing party is measured by the strength of its leader.

Bergschrund, a special form of crevasse (q.v.), almost invariably found at the junction of upper snow slopes and glacier.

Cairn, a heap of stones to indicate the start of a climb, the summit, or a doubtful point *en route*.

Chalet, a wooden Swiss cottage.

Chimney, a vertical or very steep rock cleft.

Col, a pass between two summits.

Cornice, an overhanging mass of snow or ice.

Couloir, a steep gully.

Crampons, irons worn on the feet, especially for climbing ice.

Crevasse, a rent or hole in a glacier or snowfield.

Glacier, an ice-stream, the outflow of the higher snow.

Joch, col.

Moraine, rocks, stones and debris deposited by the moving glaciers.

Moulin, a circular hole through a glacier to the rocks below, formed by water.

Névé, the glacial region above the snow-line; hardened snow.

Sérac, a pinnacle of ice.

Slab, a smooth stretch of rock such as is met most frequently on a face-climb; a slab may be steep or gently sloping.

Traverse, a route across a face or round an *arête*, in a horizontal or slanting direction.



A PRELUDE TO ADVENTURE

BY THE EDITOR

It is not to be supposed that mountaineering is a grim or exclusive sport, accessible only to men of iron nerve and physique. It is true that to us in the flat places of Britain the summit of Mont Blanc, fifteen thousand feet above us, seems almost impossibly remote, but once we have decided to make for the top our way becomes a series of well-ordered steps, no one of which may be beyond our powers. Of mountaineering, perhaps more than of any other human activity, it is true to say that you do not know what you can do until you try. Even expert climbers of long experience admit that they cannot tell by merely looking at a rock precipice whether it will "go," or not; they can by observing cracks, ledges, chimneys and flaws in the rock-structures judge of a probable line of ascent, but not until they make actual contact with fingers and toes can they be sure of success or failure. Indeed it often happens that jagged and fearsome-looking rocks are easy to climb, whereas some innocent-looking rounded slabs such as are often seen at the foot of a mountain or in the bottom twenty feet of a stream-gully are hopelessly unmanageable.

Like most things that are worth doing, mountaineering has its period of apprenticeship, a period which must be spent among the hills. You must walk before you climb, and this is no hardship because hill walking, besides being the approach to mountaineering, is in itself a delightful sport within almost everyone's reach. A day's walk, with a map as your only guide, among the heather and pines of the Leith Hill and Pitch Hill ridge in Surrey, or from Wilmington to Firle Beacon and on to Ditchling and Chanctonbury along the Sussex Downs, or across the wide sweeps of Uffington behind Avebury in Wiltshire has the elements of a day in the mountains. Although the hills are "thousand-footers" only, col, shoulder and buttress are there in embryo, and among them you can learn hill-sense and the importance of the time factor in planning expeditions—for you must be able to catch your evening train at Dorking or the one and only Sunday evening express from Savernake Junction. In Dartmoor or among the desolate Irish hills the problems of time and distance are more difficult (you are now dealing with two thousand feet contours), and in such districts lurks the mountaineer's arch-enemy—mist; other bad weather problems can be overcome by experience, but mist to the climber is like fog to the engine-driver—a complete negation of all his functions. But the finest walking in the world is surely to be found in the English Lake country, among real mountains in miniature—or so it seems to an Englishman who has not seen the Cairngorms or the Needle Ridge in Skye. Though

the heights are not great as mountains go (Scafell Pike is 3210 feet above sea-level) the rapid alternations of fell and dale, the kaleidoscopy of hill and lake scenery, charm the eye and invigorate the mind. In such a country the walker is confronted with many of the real difficulties of mountaineering (and the crags which spring abruptly from innocent-looking hillsides give silent warning of the danger of losing your way in bad weather.) The rock-climbing (as distinct from fell-walking or unroped scrambles) in the Lake district is exceedingly fine, many of the courses on the Scafell precipice and the Pillar Rock being comparable to the best rock-route in the Alps. Indeed modern climbers, working in rubber shoes or "scarpetti"¹ have evolved a series of climbs of a standard of difficulty and danger which would be unjustifiable under the severe conditions of the high Alps. The Snowdon district in North Wales is similar—if anything rather more difficult because distances tend to be greater—and Snowdon's eastern shoulder is Llewdd, the wonderful thousand-feet precipice, which is the Mecca of rock-climbers in the British Isles. You can walk, if you will, along its curious knife-edge summit, and look down the steeps from which you may at some later stage emerge, the last of a roped party, breathless but triumphant.

Venture a little farther afield, and the possibilities of hill-walking are endless. You might choose the Cevennes in France, great round six-thousand-feet lumps with pine-clad slopes and rushing torrents

¹ Rope-soled shoes.

inviting you to bathe in their pools, or the lonely ranges along the Mediterranean, or sub-alpine Switzerland, or the Dolomite passes among the groups of ethereal rock palaces which are the Dolomite peaks. These peaks must be left alone until you are very sure of your powers to climb down as well as up, for there is usually no "easy way" down in this district. But every hill-walker will soon learn to make his or her own districts, and a large-scale map of any part of Europe will suggest a thousand possible excursions wherever the contour lines huddle close together.

Mountaineering grows naturally out of this hill-walking, because it is natural to want to get to the top of the highest peaks, and this cannot be done except by climbing rocks, ice, and snow which are too steep to walk up. This is most important, and lies at the root of the philosophy of mountaineering; for climbing is not only a gymnastic exercise, exhilarating and sometimes dangerous—it arises primarily from a love of hills and mountains and a love for the freedom of their heights. This freedom can be gained only through knowledge of hills, and competence to go up them and down them and round them safely. Physical fitness, initiative, mental resolution, the power to endure, the will to conquer, all these qualities go to the making of a mountaineer, and all must be tested among the hills themselves. Feats of nerve and muscle on difficult rocks are part only of the craft—certainly a very important part in modern climbing—and climbers who learn the



ENGLISH HILLS
The Langdale Pikes in Westmorland.

beginnings of the game on British rocks are drawn inevitably to the great Alpine mountains for their fulfilment.

(The object of this book is to show something of mountaineering, and the romances of its development, as it has inspired the pens of the great climbers. In literature this kind of writing stands very high, based as it is on intense personal experience, and mountaineering needs no better apology than the stories of its great pioneers. Here are two examples of this characteristic "first-hand" writing; the first a description of a view from the Weisshorn, by John Tyndall:

The day was perfect; not a cloud was to be seen; and the gauzy haze of the distant air, though sufficient to soften the outlines and enhance the colouring of the mountains, was far too thin to obscure them. Over the peaks and through the valleys the sunbeams poured, unimpeded save by the mountains themselves, which in some cases drew their shadows in straight bars of darkness through the illuminated air. I had never before witnessed a scene which affected me like this. . . . I was part of it and it of me, and in the transcendent glory of Nature I entirely forgot myself as man. Suppose the sea waves exalted to nearly a thousand times their normal height, crest them with foam, and fancy yourself upon the most commanding crest, with the sunlight from a deep blue heaven illuminating such a scene, and you will have some idea of the form under which the Alps present themselves from the summit of the Weisshorn. East, west, north and south, rose those "billows of a granite sea," back to the distant heaven, which they hacked into an indented shore.

The second, an account by Geoffrey Young of a critical moment in his ascent of the south face of the Täschorh:

Suddenly I heard that unmistakeable scrape and grit of sliding boot-nails and clothes. Above my head, over the edge of the roof to the right, I saw Franz' legs shoot out into space. Time stopped. A shiver, like expectancy, trembled across the feeling of unseen grey wings behind me, from end to end of the cliff. I realised impassively that the swirl of the rope must sweep me from my holds before it tightened on the doubtful belay of the blister. But fate was playing out the game in regions curiously remote. My mind watched the moves, itself absorbed into the same remote, dispassionate atmosphere. It seemed unwilling to disturb the issue by formulating a thought, or even a fear. The fact of the body seemed negligible; it had no part in the observant aloofness into which all consciousness had withdrawn. Something of the same feeling of separation between the body and the watching mind is the experience of men actually falling or drowning, when action is at an end and there is not even pain to reunite bodily and mental sensation. But during the crises of this day the condition lasted, with me certainly, for spaces that could only be measured by hours.

Franz' boots again disappeared above the edge. No one in the recess had known of the slip, out of their sight and lost in the gusts. He had stopped himself miraculously on the rim by crushing his hands on to ice-dimples in the slab. The hanging rope began again to travel up along the slanting gable-end of the roof. There was a long interval, and now and then the sound of a scratting boot or the scrabble of loose surface. Then the rope began, jerkily, to work out and across far above our heads.

For the purpose of making a selection from the great mass of available material I have relied chiefly on accounts of famous first ascents during the last seventy years—a period which has seen almost everything of importance in Alpine exploration. The names which you can see in the list of contents are household words among mountaineers—Wills, Tyndall, Whymper, Leslie Stephen, Conway, Mummery, Geoffrey Young; and this book must inevitably close with some reference to the greatest mountain essay of history—the fight for the summit of Everest. The two extracts herein quoted both concern G. L. Mallory, the brilliant climber, who, with A. C. Irvine, was last seen alive forging upwards within a few hundred feet of the goal.

These mountain essays, then, are a group of adventure stories recounted at first hand; they are not in any sense an anthology of mountain literature. Such an anthology would include many writers who have never climbed; how much of his magic must Shelley owe to the inspiration of mountain, cloud and wind, and Wordsworth to his beloved Cumberland fells; and Ruskin and Meredith did not need to climb to describe mountain scenery in beautiful prose; and the mere sight of the Alps in the distance was enough to make Belloc write in the *Path to Rome*:

I saw between the branches of the trees in front of me a sight in the sky that made me stop breathing, just as a great danger at sea, or great surprise in love, or a great deliverance will make a man stop breathing. I saw something I had known in the West as a boy,

something I had never seen so grandly discovered as was this. In between the branches of the trees was a great promise of unexpected lights beyond. . . . Here were these magnificent creatures of God, I mean the Alps, which now for the first time I saw from the height of the Jura . . . up there in the sky, to which only clouds belong and birds and the last trembling colours of pure light, they stood fast and hard; not moving as do the things of the sky. . . ."

Perhaps there is more in the ascending effort of the mountaineer than meets the eye; perhaps his climbing is an outward and visible form of an inward and spiritual ascent—the writings of the great explorers may give this impression; and perhaps, too, when this book is laid aside, some of you may go out and try your luck—if so, begin among the gentle hills and one day you will see the big mountains beckoning to you.

E. F. B.

In the second edition (1933) an extract from F. S. Smythe's *Kamet Conquered* has been added, and a few corrections have been made.

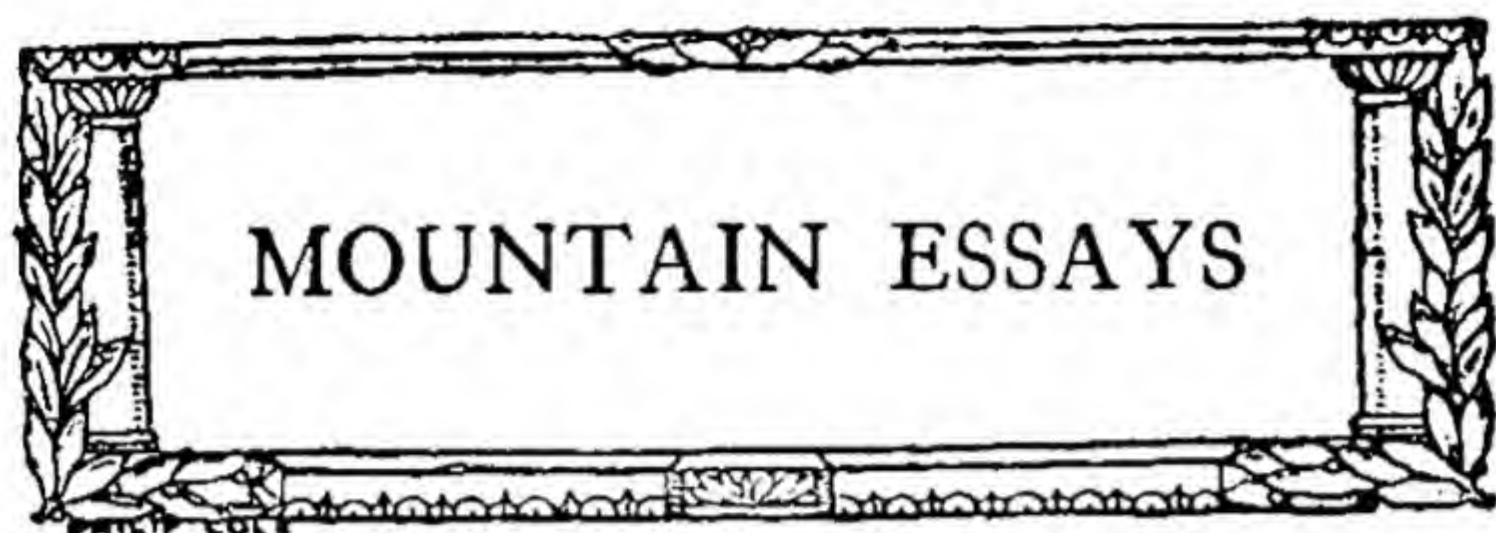
For the

of interesting for those
on time in hilly country 2. h.
going through it I can

"Hills and a Boy" is an extract from Geoffrey Winthrop Young's recently published book, *On High Hills*, and is printed here as an introduction to the accounts of mountain climbs which are to follow.

G. W. Young, poet and essayist, has a wonderful climbing record, and during the years before the war set up a standard of achievement in the Alps which is not likely to be surpassed. His own account of one of his most famous expeditions is printed later in this book (see p. 183). His place in literature is unique; he is the first and only mountaineer-poet, and there is enduring beauty in his prose descriptions of thought and action among mountains.

the difficulties that
felt me crossing the
mountain at the mouth
of the valley.



MOUNTAIN ESSAYS

HILLS AND A BOY

BY GEOFFREY WINTHROP YOUNG

(From *On High Hills.*)

There is much comfort in high hills,
and a great easing of the heart.
We look upon them, and our nature fills
with loftier images from their life apart
They set our feet on curves of freedom bent
to snap the circles of our discontent.

ONE of the few pictures left from early school-days presents a very small boy crouched on a form in the big schoolroom, that always smelt of wet soap, poring over the tragedy of the Matterhorn in a torn volume of the *Boy's Own Paper*—even the smudgy illustrations are still distinct. And another opened for a moment on the day of the passage from the private to the public school. "Well, do you think you can pass the next four years of your life happily here?" We were sitting at the time on an ivy-covered stump, above an open hillside, and looking down at the great school buildings: from which I shrank physically, but which were to prove so indulgent to

the body and its prowess, so much more of a prison for the mind. The words sounded to me almost ironical; and as I looked round at the freedom of the Downs, for a second I think I saw them almost as they are to me now. For, when once he is absorbed into the school atmosphere, no boy can again see his school environment naturally, with the unprejudiced eyes of "home." He puts on school spectacles; and he is fated ever afterwards to see and to recall school denizens and school scenery as images slightly distorted, not quite human, faintly grotesque.

It was not long afterwards that a much older boy took me for a walk over the grassy chalk ridges. Pausing on a slope of stunted trees and scattered flints, he remarked sententiously: "Now, lots of people call this country beautiful. What is your honest opinion?" His dignity demanded that I should not echo some "grown-up" formula. "Honestly" the word beauty meant nothing to me as applied to a view. I knew I liked certain vivid colours, singly or in contrast—I had discovered that as a child in the Isle of Wight, watching the sunsets on the sea in "Krakatoa" year. But the brown slopes showed none of these; and besides the view was all "school-coloured." Nor, though I looked anxiously, did the venerable backs of the Downs stiffen up, anywhere in sight, into the squared shoulders and upflung head of an exciting mountain revolt against the smooth orderliness of the earth's level habit. I felt that too; but I could certainly never have framed it as a thought, much less have put it into words. So I

only answered, with conviction, that I thought it a very dull sort of country indeed.

In Sixth Form, at a public school, the fortunate are sometimes left enough to themselves to begin again to grow an idea or to discover an interest. In Sixth Form Library, for me, the school curtains suddenly dragged apart. I came one day upon Whympers's *Scrambles*. With the first reading (of many—for I knew it in the end almost by heart) the horizon shifted. Peaks and skies and great spaces of adventure rolled upward and outward, smashing the walls of a small, eager, self-centred world. I wonder how many boys have owed the same debt to that great boy's book. Snows and glaciers began to "haunt me like a passion"; the delight in the thought of them always tempered by a little ache of unsatisfied longing. A shifting halo, like the ghost of the solid rainbows that once lighted fairyland for the child, played round any picture or story of hills, even round the words "mountain" or "Alp." A corresponding shadow of envy threw into relief any name or record that could claim an acquaintance with mountains closer than my own. I envied my own childhood, so unconscious of all that had lain hidden near at hand in our early hill walks. As the light intensified with the reading of mountain books I began to live in two worlds. From a dull lesson I could escape at will, to revel in the pleasanter problems of some imaginary and enormous ascent. The flash of blue-white ice and of red rocks followed me even on to the football-field and to the bathing-place, and only left me in the

rush of exciting movement. In our school hymn-books we, of the choir at least, were accustomed to scribble the date over the hymn of the day and add the record of any great event, such as our appearance in a school match or the winning of a school prize. It is curious now to read among these scrawls the first assertions of a new personality, less arrogant or, at all events, less priggish: "Shall I ever go to the Alps?" and "If I could only be a mountaineer!"

Something of the romance, of the recovered rainbow light which filled every corner of that alternative world, has faded with familiarity and with the increasing interest in the technicalities of climbing. In fact, I do not think that it ever shone among the mountains themselves with the brilliance with which it coloured those later school-days of hope and anticipation. The ache of unsatisfied longing survived perhaps more keenly, and is even now not incapable of challenging its only subduer, the philosophic temper of middle life. But the still, steady flame of aspiration, to which all the emotions kindled by the world of hills real or imaginary contributed, the almost passionate belief that the mountains hold for many of us some ideal which it is even better that they should continue to hold up before us unattained, has never flickered.

.

There used to be a delightful toy, a crystal ball, with a cottage or rural scene in its heart. When the globe was shaken cunningly, snow swirled, and the

scene lived. In the same way, I have but to catch the right crystal of a past mood, and at a twirl all the happenings not of one but of many mountain days eddy simultaneously and vividly into life. Whole hot green days, of feverish trappings, of colt-like scampers down the slopes and of enthralling rock scrambles, days vibrating with discovery and with a nervousness of the unknown, are recoverable only as a single impression. All the hours that my unaccustomed skin was scorched up into blisters by the glare of succeeding hillsides, and all the contrasts of cold pools into which I plunged, so irritating the blisters the more, can be re-lived in a second's recall of the one feeling of acute facial discomfort. Down the side of Great Gable I may have been groping for hours in a dense fog; and suddenly a vast black bird, big as a tar barrel, swooped straight at my head. I flung up an arm: nothing struck it; and as I lowered it again my eyes, which had been long over-straining into an imagined void, clicked back into focus. I found I was looking out through a window of dissipating cloud at a dark patch of hillside on the face of Scafell across the valley. The abrupt shifting of the limit of sight, from a white remoteness up to a threatening black proximity and back again to a reasonable aloofness, twisted the universe into a knot of dizziness, painful even to recall; and in this, as in a whirlpool, all the events of long days have spun to a centre, and revolve half-submerged, coagulated. If I am looking at the Honister Crag, impossibly distant against a morning sky, and in the same instant I am

past it and struggling between the dank walls of the Pillar Stone, and still in the same instant I am stumbling back at midnight out of Borrowdale over the fell to Watendlath, convinced that all the ankle-breaking loose stones on the track are the petrified expostulations of former wayfarers, the coloured segments of that day have been torn from any context of space and time, and arrange themselves in a flat design, like the diamonds on a patchwork quilt. As on a quilt they are seen simultaneously; and, again like a quilt, they are spread out or rolled up together whenever a breath of the presiding humour of the day long past revives or recedes. On that particular day it was a humour of passive persistence, of gleeful holding on with set teeth, myself stationary, while the hills poured like a cataract under my feet, and morning and evening rushed past over my head.

Most insistent of all is the memory of a starlit winter nightfall of return over the Styehed Pass. Venus was astonishingly in the ascendant, and like a great silver gong oscillated above the hills. So incomparably brilliant, that on the slant of the snow beside me travelled a faint but perceptible violaceous darkening, my own shadow by star-shine. And all that memory is steeped in *sound*: it comes up out of the past like the singing of a choir from the clerestory of a cathedral. The harmony of the white hills and of the silvery night was so overwhelming that it filled not only sight but all the senses; and whenever imagination would now revive it, the ear of memory first responds, and to a rhythm as of chanting the

star, the snow, and the silence are reborn. The most radiant picture ever fashioned by the poetry of words must have been the child of some such night, "when the morning stars sang together, and all the Sons of God shouted for joy."

A number, also, of sights and incidents which seemed to conflict with what I took to be the common mood, or which the hills made use of to change the mood unexpectedly, importuned memory in a totally different fashion, and survived for the very reason of their incongruity or of their quality of surprise: the sudden chuckle of lichen upon the rocks, heard through a clamour of storm and gloom; the intersecting of lines on different planes from opposing hills, so as to form, incalculably, a single perfect arc against the sky; the fleeting scarlet berries of a mountain-ash curtsying impertinently over a time-worn jut of repellent cliff; the flashing of "jolly jewels" under the stillness of a grey rock pool; the quiescent bodies of spongy moss dangling like strings of green or tawny rabbit-backs along the edges of hurrying waterfalls; the desperate fear that broke in tumult over my confidence when I first realised that a rock may prove steeper than it looks, and had to use my teeth to help out my handholds; the magical change of heart from angry weariness to tranquillity at the sight of a stone-chat chaffing and flirting with me out of the soundless mist. These and countless other foundlings of sight and thought are all gathered into the happy garden of little stray memories. To this there is no admission for those with useful minds,

to whom their past lies open like a book with diagram and concordance. It is a fairy compensation to the forgetful. For the little lost memories to whom we have played the Pied Piper, and who have strayed after us out of time and place, are peculiarly our own, and stay with us, orphaned but dancing gleefully. They are always there; to play hide-and-seek with us in dull moments, through surroundings whose variety would shock a geographer. For the happy garden is built up of diverse fragments of scenery, glimpses unnoticed at the time, from white mountains, from northern forests, from eastern deserts, from many waters of torrent and sea and from the lanes and quiet fields. And through it, freed from all burden of likelihoods, scamper our strayaways, remembered voices, snatches of music, expressions, gestures, the spring of a child's foot, the curve of a stalk on the wind, the light of spring flowers brimming out at the edges of a copse, the feeling of the rush of a dive,—all only happy memories and all our children for life by involuntary adoption. One little rogue of a memory gave me some concern as I grew up. It would dance and play among the others, but whenever I sought it out alone it hid impishly and peeped out at me behind my back. One day I happened to walk down a path of overhanging yews, down which I had never dared to go more than half-way as a small child. I came to a corner where the trees blocked the further view—and I recognised my little stray memory! It was what I should have seen—but did not see—had I ventured round the corner!

At the same instant my playmate left me for ever. For if by some chance we repass where one of our little memories belongs, the world of fact reclaims it, and it grows up straightway into a staid recollection with local responsibilities, never again to follow the Piper about the happy garden.

These primitive scrambling days made many recruits for my garden. It took long to master the difficulties of mountains, longer to interpret their moods rightly. My observation of the surface had to be unremitting, and my intuition of the mood was the oftener at fault. And so a host of unrelated, half-seen views, unimportant sounds and meaningless gay movements of things, portions of a complete mountain thought had I grasped it more intelligently, escaped my imperfect assembling of impressions, and dodged when and where they pleased under the threshold of consciousness into secret corners of memory. As the years went by, and I took better order with them, the shepherding came to be performed almost too thoroughly. The most irrelevant detail of the hills, every transient tone in a passing sunset, was swept up into consciousness and tenderly set back in its environment. My later children of vagrant memory are still numerous in the garden, but they are the trove of the sea, the city, and the level places. To the true mountaineer the "precious things of the lasting hills" are a trust; and the wayward progress of a Pied Piper, of the eclectic traveller who steals the flower of every experience to thrust it as an arbitrary adornment into his personal record,

seemed an unworthy trespass as soon as the terms of the trust became clear to me. The mountains were the home of their own marvellous impressions; and the vitality and force of their inspiration diminished in proportion as the impressions were separated from their home atmosphere. And the mountains were more: in return for my guardianship of their integrity they offered me a sanctuary for all the higher impulses, all the less sordid hopes and imaginings which visited me anywhere through the years. Whatever of honourable purpose or of unselfish delight the way of life suggested, I had but to put it to the test of a mountain setting and share it, when proven, with the heights and the wind, and I could be certain of finding it again, untouched by time and reinvigorating as youth itself, whenever and wherever I returned among the hills.

Solitude was essential, as I had now discovered, for the creation of this mutual understanding with the mountains. But, as a practical consideration, while a little loneliness clarifies the mind of a man and restores his sense of proportion, more than enough makes him a little mad. On an evening descent of Grain Ghyll, where the water spurts in liquid prisms over lintels of a rock that we may call jasper, chrysoprase, jade, porphyry, beryl, serpentine, green agate, or green chalcedony, according to our sense of colour or our absence of knowledge, I became aware that the rocks and wind were speaking to me from somewhere inside my ears, with tongues, and I was startled to hear my own voice, as it were that of



THE WAY OF THE ROCK-CLIMBER

another person some way off, raised in loud reply. Unquestionably the emotional intimacy with nature had been carried far enough for the time. Companionship was needed to restore the balance between nature and human nature, and to enable me to obtain in the security of combination a more competent knowledge of climbing pure and simple. Instinct told me that the better climber I made myself, the less risk there would be, should I venture again alone, of this mountain exhilaration, almost exaltation, capturing the workings of the spirit to an extent irreconcilable with reason and safety.

The enterprising members of a "reading party" responded generously to this fresh requirement. With the aid of a borrowed hay-rope we turned to serious rock climbing. The perilous cycle began with a crossing of the Pillar, where the hay-rope performed salvationist miracles upon an uncharted descent of the west face. It ended in a race for the Napes Needle in a thick fog. Now the Needle was only seldom and solemnly climbed in those days. I must have found it first; for I recollect scuttling up it like a lizard and peeping over from the shoulder. My only fear—then—was that a friend might burst out of the mist below and still beat me in the race for the top. But on the descent I jammed my knee in the well-known narrows of the crack, and I had plenty of time to absorb something of the suggestive terror of the downward view.

The passion for rock climbing caught hold. It had developed in logical order out of a steady apprentice-

ship to the hills, and there was no danger of the manifold interests that make up the happiness of mountaineering being lost sight of among the apparatus of its attractive rock gymnasium. To be introduced to mountains only as to occasions for prodigious feats too often means the permanent entanglement of our feet and fingers in the outer fringes of the real mountain glory. Or, so as to disguise the truism under another metaphor, let us say that to have supped unwholesomely upon sensation at our dawn of enterprise renders us cloyed and uninterested before our midday manhood, and, often, splenful and uninteresting in our reminiscent decline. But difficult climbing comes in its natural place when the enthusiasm for the mountain world is already a vigorous growth, and when the body, its muscles and nerves, are beginning to clamour for an increasing share in the active delight. (The charm of physical effort is then no longer a distraction.) To indulge and increase skill and strength serves but to multiply our opportunities for discovering new and healthy sensation, and widens and deepens the capacity of our enthusiasm to enjoy them.

Chapman
Chapman

KAMET (25,447 ft.) is the highest summit yet attained. Its conqueror was F. S. Smythe, famous for his daring exploits on the Brenva face of Mont Blanc and a member of the unsuccessful Kangchenjunga expedition of 1930. His success on Kamet (1932) is a triumph of youth and physical fitness, backed up by splendid organization and equipment.

Kamet is one of the Great Himalayas, towards the western end of the range. The dangers of this climb are from ice-avalanches (which may sweep the faces, couloirs, and glaciers on a scale unknown in the Alps), from cold and wind, and from the difficulties of keeping steady and carrying the necessary food, clothing, and sleeping equipment at a great altitude when the action of the heart and the functions of the brain are impaired by lack of oxygen. The expedition was conducted in a series of assaults by which successive camps with tents and provisions were established higher and higher up the mountain until eventually a point was reached from which the summit could be climbed in one day. The chapter in this book describes the final assault from Camp 5 (23,300 ft.), (the fifth camp above the Base Camp) and is the climax of the venture. The most difficult and dangerous part had already been surmounted lower down, where rings and ropes were fitted by the leading climbers in an almost vertical ice wall, to enable porters to carry up loads. The assaulting party consisted of F. S. Smythe, R. L. Holdsworth, E. E. Shipton, and two Darjeeling porters, Lewa who was in charge of the native contingent, and Nima Dorje. Three other Britishers were on the expedition, Wing-Commander E. B. Beauman, Captain E. St. J. Birnie, and Dr. C. R. Greene, of whom the two last made the second ascent.



KAMET CONQUERED

BY F. S. SMYTHE

THE night passed; the lightning became feeble and finally died away; petulant gusts of wind set the frost-stiffened canvas rustling and crackling.

A cold dawn filtered into a cold world. With a conscious effort I heaved myself to my knees. The sleeping-bag cracked sharply; it was sheeted with ice deposited by my congealed breath. With numbed fingers I fumbled at the frozen tapes securing the flaps of the tent and, parting them at last, peered outside. A cloudless sky was shot with green and orange; the peaks stood from the night like pallid statues. I glanced upwards. Dawn was gilding the crest of Kamet. Now was the time to start, but it was too cold—the coldest morning I ever remember in the Himalaya. The world almost creaked in the cold. To have left the comparative shelter of our tents would have meant certain frostbite. It was essential that we should start comfortably, with a hot breakfast inside us, and cooking and eating under such conditions were impossible. I slipped my hands back into my sleeping-bag and busied myself restoring the circulation to my numbed finger-tips. How easily circulation is lost at high altitudes, and how slowly and painfully it returns!

The sun was not long in coming, and we emerged thankfully from our tents into its life-giving rays.

Breakfast was a hurried affair. We craved sugar more than any other substance, but tinned fruit and sardines also went down well, and so did steaming cups of tea.

We spoke but little; our minds were busied by thoughts of what the day might bring forth. At 8 a.m. we started off, on our final push for the summit.

We climbed on two ropes, Shipton and Lewa on one, Holdsworth, Nima Dorje, and I on the other. We carried rucksacks with food and spare clothes, and Nima Dorje bore a heavy load consisting of some 20 lbs. of cinematograph apparatus.

Between Camp 5 and the foot of the northern face of Kamet stretched an almost level expanse of snow. We had hoped against hope that the westerly winds which lash the upper regions of the mountain had hardened the surface of the snow into a crust sufficiently solid to enable us to walk comfortably without having to do anything more than kick steps. Our hopes were not fulfilled; we had not marched more than a few yards from the camp before we were sinking in boot deep.

The foot of the slope up which we must go was littered with ice-blocks, fallen from a line of séracs 1,000 ft. higher. Fortunately, by keeping well to the left, we were able to avoid the danger zone, and were thus spared the ordeal of having to run the gauntlet of ice avalanches.

But the snow, if disagreeably soft, was at least

consistent in its softness; it was possible to maintain a rhythm. I have already written of the importance of maintaining a rhythm in high-altitude mountaineering. It is better to have moderately soft snow consistent in its softness than a mixture of very soft and very hard snow on which rhythmical movement is impossible. Of course, when very soft snow is encountered, rhythm is equally impossible, owing to the difficulty and effort of lifting the foot, and had the snow between Camp 5 and the summit of Kamet been very soft the whole way, there would have been no hope of reaching the summit in one day, and we should have been forced to pitch a higher camp.

Shipton, Holdsworth, and I took it in turns to lead. We did about a quarter of an hour each. Had there been only two of us to stamp out the steps the work would have been very exhausting, but the difference between taking a turn every half an hour and taking it every quarter of an hour at such an altitude is enormous.

In its lower portion the slope was between 30° and 40° in angle: it steepened gradually.

We sat down for a rest. As we sat, our thudding hearts and hard-pressed lungs gradually eased to a more normal rhythm. We had climbed the first 500 feet in an hour and had reason to congratulate ourselves. Immediately below us were Meade's Col and the camp—toy-like tents and snow crumpled with footmarks. Only the Eastern Ibi Gamin overlooked us. To the right was the snowy edge of the eastern

precipice. Fleecy clouds were beginning to twist up from the valleys. The plains of Tibet were opening out; their brown and yellow expanses melted into violet distances. Eastwards, Gurla Mandhata rose serenely.

We munched a little chocolate and sipped tea from a thermos flask. It was gloriously hot in the sun, and as yet no wind had arisen to chill us. Lolling in the snow, I felt languid and sleepy. Further advance seemed unnecessary and even absurd. Why not continue to sit and drowse the day away in the warm sun? I forced myself to take some photographs and change a cinematograph film. It was simple and easy work, yet it involved expenditure of both physical and mental energy.

The few minutes we allowed ourselves soon passed. Shipton and Lewa rose to their feet and started up the slope. It was interesting to watch them. Shipton, a born mountaineer, has acquired to perfection the art of climbing a snow-slope with the minimum of effort. Lewa, on the other hand, is so constituted that he tends to expend more of his magnificent energy than is necessary. So much fire and dash is his to command that he cannot properly control its tumultuous outflow, and his eager jerky movements contrasted oddly with the almost leisurely rhythm of Shipton. As they toiled through the soft snow, I trained the cine-camera on them and "shot" some film. I remember wishing as I did so that I had not burdened myself with the work of taking a film of the expedition, and I vowed that I would never do it again.

Holdsworth, Nima Dorje, and I followed. One moment we had been sitting at ease, fully capable of appreciating the glorious panorama spread out before us; the next moment, almost with a suddenness of a blow, ease had been relegated to the past, and we became once more panting automatons of flesh and blood. Sitting, we had forgotten that we were breathing the thin air of nearly 25,000 feet; but even the effort of rising to our feet served like the touch of a foot on the sensitive throttle of a powerful racing car, to set the machinery of heart and lungs pounding furiously.

The snow worsened. Previously, it had been merely soft, but now we encountered crusted snow of the most malignant type, crust which broke when the whole weight had been transferred to the forward foot, letting us sink helplessly into the soft powdery snow beneath.

During the ascent of the first 500 feet we had been content to halt only while the lead was being changed, but now, owing to the exhausting nature of the work, the leader found it necessary to sink down into the snow for a rest every few yards, whilst even those behind were glad to follow his example. During these frequent halts we could discern, nearly 3,000 feet beneath us, the second party mounting slowly towards Camp 5. If to us they appeared mere dots moving with the slowness of a clock's hour hand, how must we have appeared to them? It was good to see them, for we knew that they must be watching us, and were with us in spirit urging us on to success.

We arrived at a point where the slope steepened abruptly. Ice-walls and soft snow forced us diagonally to the left towards the edge of the eastern precipice. Now, for the first time since leaving the camp, we could see the final slope separating us from the summit ridge. It was at this slope, 400 feet high, that we had gazed so doubtfully the evening before. Previous opinion as to its steepness needed no confirmation. From the camp it had looked steep, and we knew now that it *was* steep. Everything depended on its condition. Supposing that the rippled, wind-blown snow covering it concealed hard ice? If step-cutting was necessary throughout its entire height it would be impossible to overcome it without pitching a higher camp. Time would defeat us; it would take many hours—a whole day's work at least. And supposing the slope consisted of snow ready to avalanche if disturbed? There was no avoiding it. Ice-walls barred approach to the right, sheer precipices fell away to the left. Then indeed we should be conclusively beaten. Supposing it proved necessary to pitch a higher camp; was there a ledge on that inhospitable slope of Kamet where a camp could be pitched? We could see none. And were the porters capable of carrying up equipment? It was doubtful; they were already tired from their exertions between Camps 4 and 5.

The edge of the eastern precipice abutted as an ill-defined ridge against the final slope. At the point where the ridge merged into the slope a large boulder of Kamet's reddish granite projected from the ice.

It looked a welcome resting-place where we might recoup our energies for the final tussle. Up to it we started to climb. Perhaps 100 feet below the boulder, our feet struck ice beneath the snow. The snow thinned until it was no longer deep enough to hold the foot securely to the ice. Step-cutting became necessary. The leader braced himself to the task. The axe swung back and leapt forward, meeting the ice with a dull thud.

In the Alps, the ringing thud of the axe and the swish and tinkle of dislodged fragments are music in my ears. The confident raising of the body from step to step, by limbs untired and in perfect training, brings happiness and contentment. But cutting steps in ice at 25,000 feet is a very different matter. The ice-slope is not to be welcomed as providing a test of skill: it is an implacable enemy, mute yet savage, passive yet resistant. It hates.

Thud, thud, thud. A step is made. The foot lifts slowly; the nailed boot grinds into the ice.

Thud, thud, thud. There is a duller, less confident ring in the sound of the axe striking the ice. The work stops. Heart and lungs are striving desperately for oxygen; the snow-slope swims uncertainly before the eyes of the exhausted mountaineer. He doubles up, and gasps, and gasps, and gasps.

Presently, his body ceases its clamouring for oxygen. He braces his tired and quivering muscles, grasps his axe, and swings it forward again into the green face of the ice.

Thud, thud, thud.

And so it goes on.

One hundred feet—an hour's unremitting toil. We approached the red boulder and, glancing gratefully at it, promised ourselves a long rest on its sun-warmed surface. But as we cut steps up the ice by the side of it our premature gratitude changed to disgust. The boulder was smooth and sloping and there was no place on it where we could sit. But, in one respect at least, fate was kind; the snow above the boulder lay a foot deep on the ice. One by one, we sank down into it.

Nima Dorje was last on the rope. He was going badly. His feet were slipping from the ice steps and he was using the rope as a hand-hold, a sure sign of exhaustion. As he approached, I could see that his eyes were dull and had lost their animation. His thick lips were parted widely and his lower jaw hung down. It was no surprise to us when, on joining us, he sank into the snow gasping out that he was finished, and could go on no farther. He had bravely done his best and had carried a load of cinematograph apparatus weighing 20 lbs. on his back to a height of over 25,000 feet. He soon recovered from his temporary exhaustion, and although it was impossible for him to continue, he was able to return alone safely, for the route was devoid of danger so long as he kept to the uphill track, and a slip on the ice-slope could be attended with no worse consequences than a slide into the soft snow beneath.

It was now 2 p.m. Six hours had passed since we

had left Camp 5. The first 500 feet had been climbed in about an hour, but the last 1,300 feet had taken five hours, an average speed of well under 300 feet an hour. This slow rate of progress had been due to the terrible snow and the time spent hewing steps in the ice-slope below the boulder. Anxiously we stared at the slope above us. There was no deception as to its steepness. Its average angle was well over 50° —an angle at least as steep as that of the ice-slopes on the Brenva face of Mont Blanc. Everything depended on the condition of the snow. Had the slope been pure ice from top to bottom there would have been no alternative but to retreat and devote our energies during the next two or three days to the difficult task of establishing a higher camp, or possibly of attempting the alternative route from Meade's Col.

As far as the boulder, a slip could not have mattered, but the final slope overlooked the great eastern precipice of Kamet, and a slip on it was not to be thought of. Heaving ourselves wearily to our feet, we recommenced the ascent. Again we found ourselves on disagreeable mushroom-like plates of snow, but on the whole firmer snow than we had encountered lower down. Between these plates there was powder snow, and the foot sank into it encountering ice. Here step-cutting was necessary. To do it we had to summon up the whole of our mental determination as well as our physical energy, and both were now dulled by fatigue and altitude. The temptation was to kick steps and trust to the snow holding. Luck had been with us so far, and we could scarcely afford

to abuse it now. In places steps were necessary for safety, and I am glad to be able to record that those steps were cut.

The slope steepened until it was practically a wall. We advanced in turn. A few feet at a time was enough, and we would then stop to gasp for oxygen and renewed energy.

I remember that on these occasions, as I leaned forward to rest on my in-driven ice-axe, I could see my feet, a few yards of wind-caked snow-slope, and then the East Kamet Glacier, nearly 7,000 feet beneath. By the boulder sat the solitary figure of Nima Dorje. The sun was still shining on him, but already we were in chill shadow.

In with the ice-axe and on. The plates of hard snow swished away into the abyss, a gentle sibilant whisper. When I was leading, there was naught but the blank slope before me. When my companions were leading, my vision was limited to their feet. I remember once experiencing a ridiculous feeling of annoyance at the sight of Holdsworth's boot, breaking away one of the evil snow-slabs. I thought savagely to myself, Why can't he kick a better step—why fiddle and fumble in that ridiculous manner? But, when my turn came to lead, my feet kicked just as clumsily. Directly above us the declining sun illuminated a small flake of snow projecting from the summit ridge with a calm gleam. The flake seemed always as far away. Then suddenly, to my surprise, I could touch it. Driving my ice-axe in before me, I hauled myself up on both arms, crushing

the flake beneath me. I found myself sprawling, exhausted with the effort, face downwards, across the summit ridge. My head was in the sun, my feet in the shadow. Huge columns of cloud were rising djinn-like from the blue depths into which I gazed. They swayed unsubstantially for a moment as I fought for oxygen. For perhaps a minute I lay gasping like a stranded fish, then, pulling myself together, swung astride the sharp roof-like ridge and began taking in Holdsworth's rope round the ice-axe. Presently, we were all congregated on the ridge.

We had hoped to find ourselves on the summit, or within a few yards of it, but we saw immediately that we were separated from it by a knife-like crest of snow. As we gazed along the narrow path we must tread, we experienced a pang of apprehension. Some thirty yards distant the ridge rose up into a sharp point. Beyond this nothing was to be seen, but we realized instinctively that the point was not the summit. Slopes of rock and snow, which we could see sloping up beyond it, indicated something higher. Had Kamet a surprise in store for us? What if there was an impracticable cleft in the ridge between us and the summit? We would have given much for a rest; but to rest was impossible, until we had stood upon the point and seen what lay beyond.

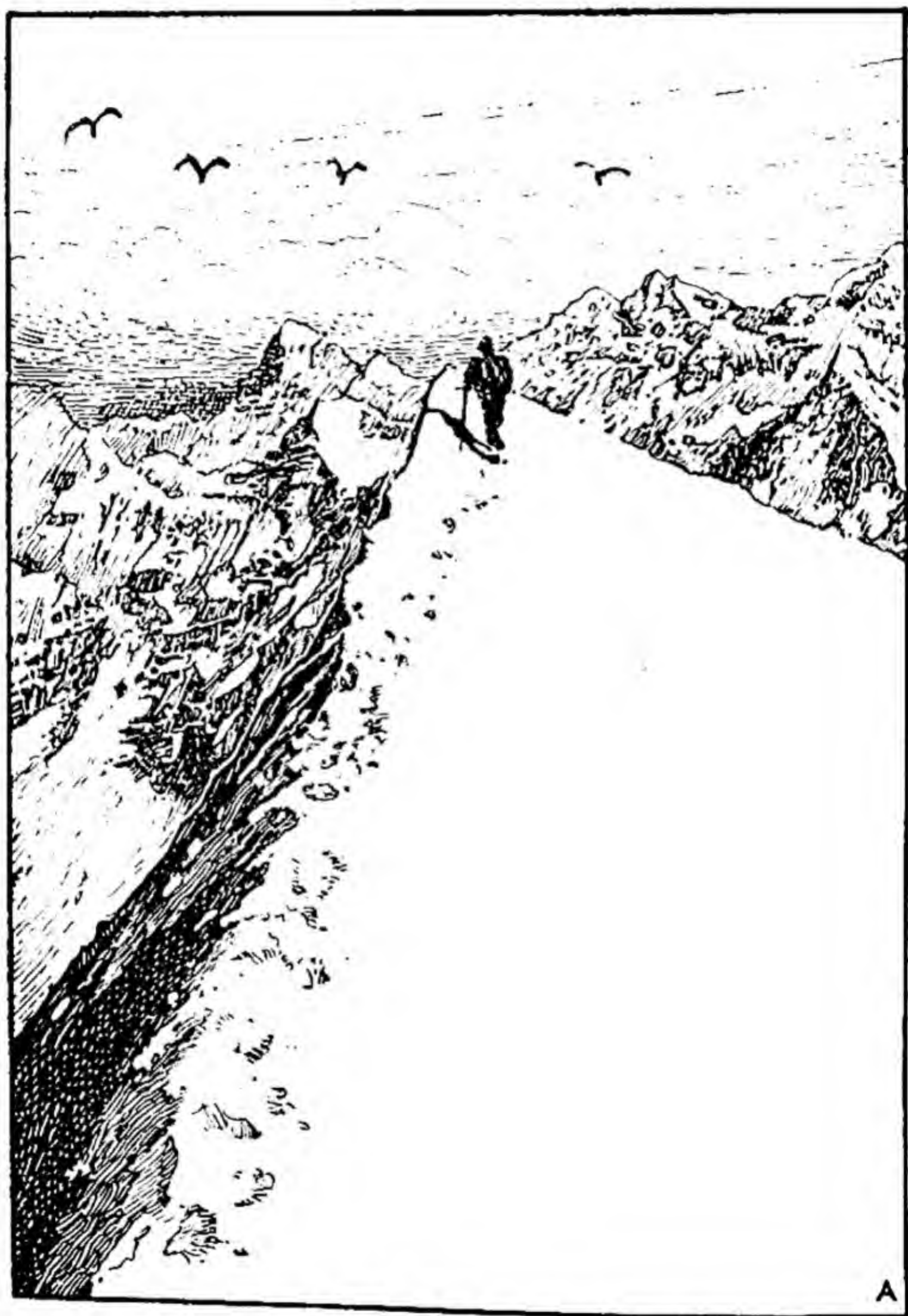
We started to toil along the ridge. It was nearly horizontal and exceedingly sharp. On either hand the slopes fell away with great steepness; it seemed incredible that we could have ascended from those shadowy abysses to the right of us. I remember

trampling and crushing the delicate snow edge with a careful yet savage deliberation. There must be no mistake now. On the slope below we had been mere automatons—toiling atoms incapable almost of reasoned and coherent thought—but now we were thinking men again, capable of realizing our amazing position on this snowy edge of the world. Tiredness was replaced by a fierce exhilaration. The numbed brain leapt into renewed activity. The summit was almost within our grasp; surely it could not escape us now? We gained the point and gazed over and beyond it? At our feet the ridge sank down to a shallow gap. Beyond the gap it merged gently into a small cone of snow—the summit!

We seized hold of Lewa and shoved him on in front of us. As I clutched hold of him I could hear the breath jerking from him in wheezy gasps. I do not think that he quite understood what we were doing. And so he was first to tread the summit. It was the least compliment we could pay to those splendid men, our porters, to whom we owed the success of our expedition.

As we reached the summit we saw that there was another equally high summit a few yards away, so, to be quite sure, we trudged across to it. Nothing further disputed us and for the last time we sank down into the snow.

With numbed and fumbling hands, I manipulated my camera and cine-camera, photographing and filming the party, the view from the summit, and the summit itself from the range of a few yards.



KAMET—THE SUMMIT RIDGE

By the time I had finished, my fingers were stiff, white and dead. Fearing frost-bite, I beat my hands together. Circulation returned sluggishly and so painfully that I could barely refrain from groaning.

We left Camp 5 at 8 a.m. and arrived on the summit at 4.30 p.m.; eight and a half hours work for about 2,300 feet of ascent. As the first 500 feet had been climbed in a little over an hour, the ascent of the last 1,500 feet had taken no less than seven and a half hours—an average climbing speed of little more than 200 feet an hour. Snow conditions, rather than altitude, had been responsible for this funereal rate of progress. As we lay in the snow, Holdsworth smoked half a pipe. We had often chaffed him for his devotion to his pipe, but we could scarcely do so after this. Whether or not he *enjoyed* smoking a pipe at 25,447 feet is another matter. At all events, this offering to the Goddess Nicotine deserves to be recorded.

The view? It is difficult to render any account of it. We were too far above the world. Our gaze passed almost contemptuously over mighty range upon mighty range, to seek repose in the violet hazes of illimitable horizons. Huge clouds, sun-crested above, purple-shadowed below, stood out from the valleys, but their topmost turrets could not attain to our level. The breeze fanning us was deathly cold, the silence and sense of isolation almost terrible. There were no green valleys to be seen; all about us were peaks of black rock and glaring ice and snow, frozen outposts of the infinite. Thousands of

feet beneath curved the glacier flowing south-westwards of Kamet, ribbed and girded with moraines like some monstrous dragon crawling from one cloudy cavern to another. Our sole link with the world was the camp we had left, now a mere blob on the snow of Meade's Col. Perhaps our friends there were regarding us. We rose to our feet, waved ice-axes, and let out a gasping shout. But our voices sounded pitifully weak through the thin air, and there came no response from the dotted tents.

It was 5 p.m., time was vital; in less than three hours we should be overtaken by night. We rose wearily and stiffly to our feet, and tramped back along the summit ridge.

Now that the job was done, we began to realize how tired we were. It is at such times of mountaineering anticlimax that accidents occur. The oncoming of night, cold, fatigue, and desire to return as quickly as possible to the comparative comfort of Camp 5 all combined to tempt us to rush down the upper slope. To have done so would have been mountaineering folly of the most elementary character. Steadiness was imperative; impatience had to be curbed. We progressed slowly, rope length by rope length. How slow it was! Impatience and resignation flared up alternately. It seemed as though we were doomed for ever to cling and crawl like snails to this snowy flank of Kamet. We descended in two parties, as on the ascent, but found it quicker to take separate lines rather than for both parties to descend the upward track, even though occasional

step-cutting was necessary. Yet, if progress was slow, it was also certain and efficient. In drove the ice-axe into the snow until it struck the ice beneath; the rope was hitched around it, and down went the first man as quickly as possible, until the whole length of the rope was out; then he in turn anchored himself firmly, and took in the rope of the last man as he descended. In the Alps such tactics are seldom necessary even on the steepest snow-slope, but we were not in the Alps; we were tired men at a height of 25,000 feet, and a slip must be expected at any moment.

At the foot of the final slope Holdsworth and I halted to await Shipton and Lewa. The latter was moving very slowly and was obviously distressed. His face was greenish in hue, his eyes rigid and staring from exhaustion. He groaned out that he was in great pain, and pointed to his stomach. There was nothing we could do for him save to encourage him to continued effort and to relieve him of his load. As I lifted the rucksack with its 20 lbs. or more of film apparatus, I was forcibly reminded of the amount of energy Nima Dorje and Lewa had expended getting it to the summit. Swinging it on to my back overbalanced me, and my tired legs almost collapsed beneath me. Yet, even at that moment, I said to myself that as the "damned thing" had been got to the summit, it somehow had to be got down again.

The cold became more severe, and the coldness of high altitudes is akin to the coldness of space itself.

The sun's last flare lit peak and snowfield. Night, a vast phalanx of purple, rushed up the sky. The slanting rays of the setting sun flooded the Tibetan plains, throwing into sharp relief numberless little crags and hills, that stood out like the fantastic buildings of some demon city.

Day drained quickly from the peaks. A cold pallor invested the world. And now we witnessed a strange spectacle. As the sun sank in the west another sun rose to rival it in the east, but a sun with rays, not of light, but of darkness, that radiated upward to the zenith of the evening sky. It was the parallel shadows of the peaks in the west cast by the real sun across the sky to such a distance, that they appeared to converge in a point above the eastern horizon.

I do not remember feeling exhausted, yet I do remember that my knees were so curiously weak that a stumble in the crusted snow or a slither on the hard crust was difficult to correct without falling.

Figures detached themselves from the camp beneath and came slowly through the dusk to meet us. A few minutes later I was grasping Birnie's hand and drinking hot liquid from a vacuum flask which he had thoughtfully brought with him. A glowing warmth spread through my tired limbs; a profound contentment permeated my whole being. A hundred yards more and the tents of Camp 5 loomed up before us. The afterglow of a cloudless sunset saw us stumbling into camp.

We had not escaped scatheless. Intense cold during

the descent had wreaked its will upon us. Poor Lewa was so exhausted that he could scarcely stagger. The removal of his boots and stockings revealed feet frozen and immovable, the whiteness of which was already changing to a dark purple. Men were immediately set to work to try to restore their circulation, but though they massaged for an hour or more his feet were far beyond the initial stages of frost-bite, and circulation would not return. Holdsworth's right big toe was also frost-bitten and Shipton's toe-tips were slightly affected. I was the only one to escape, and I attribute my immunity, not to an exceptionally good circulation, but to the fact that when mountaineering and ski-ing in the Alps I have made it my invariable practice to keep my toes moving in my boots by bunching them up and straightening them out at periodical intervals throughout a cold day. This had become so much of a habit that, though I cannot remember doing so, I feel certain that I kept it up on Kamet.

Supper went down well that night, although we were too tired to eat much. Tinned beans and tinned fruit, followed by a jorum of hot rum, set us in a warm glow that lasted throughout a cold night. For some time Shipton and I lay cosily side by side in our sleeping-bags, recalling the events of the day. Already they seemed a past chapter of life, and, as drowsiness gradually overcame me, they receded farther and farther into the forgotten. Quietness fell upon the camp. In the south, lightning winked and glimmered ceaselessly over the foothills.

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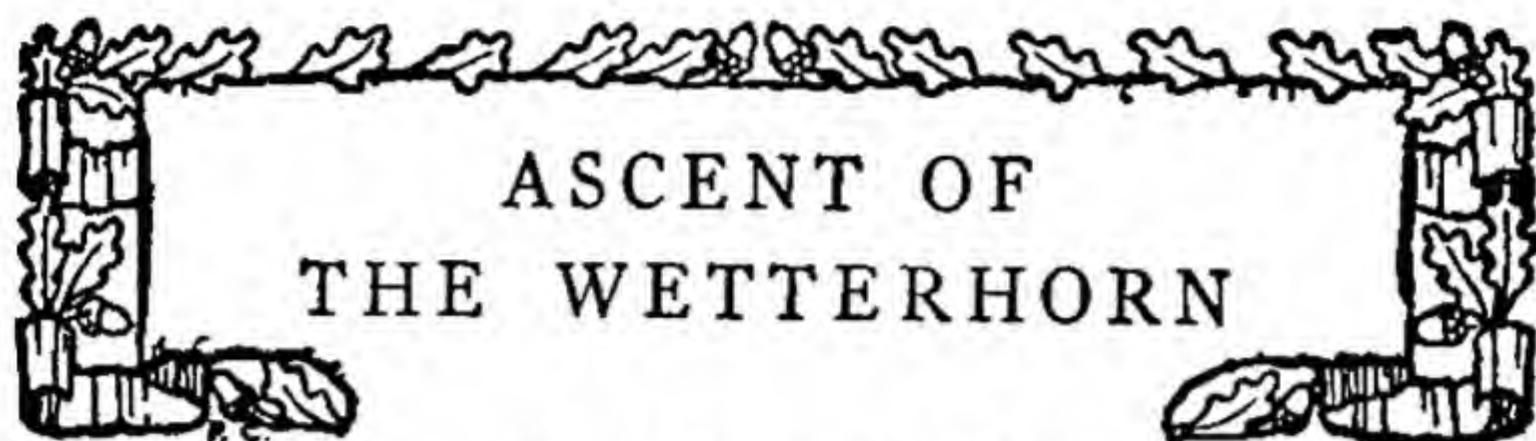
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The WETTERHORN (12,149 feet) is one of the huge Bernese Oberland peaks. The Oberland chain is an offshoot to the north of the main chain of the Alps, and the Wetterhorn is towards its north-east extremity in the neighbourhood of the rival giants Finsteraarhorn (14,026 feet) and Gross Schreckhorn (13,386 feet). To the south and west of these stands the Jungfrau (13,660 feet). The famous ascent of 1854 described in the following pages was not, in fact, the first ascent, although Wills and his guides thought it to be so at the time.

Nowadays the Wetterhorn is often climbed from the Grindelwald side, but in reading this and subsequent accounts of early exploration it is important to remember that a big "first ascent" is a totally different problem from following an established course. Uncertainty as to the right way means waste of all-important time and a new route may have unforeseen difficulties, may not "go" at all, or may conceivably lead to an impasse where neither advance nor retreat can be made in safety.

Sir Alfred Wills (1828-1912) was a Judge and a Privy Councillor. He was in the vanguard of the band of English climbers who opened up the Alps during the 'fifties and 'sixties; this essay is from his book, *Wanderings among the High Alps*.



ASCENT OF THE WETTERHORN

BY ALFRED WILLS

(From *Wanderings among the High Alps*.)

Thou wert to me,
That minute, with thy brow in Heaven,
As sure a sign of Deity
As e'er to mortal man was given.
Nor ever, were I destined yet
To live my life twice o'er again,
Can I the deep-felt awe forget—
The ecstasy that filled me then!

MOORE.

J'avoue, que si l'on m'avait demandé mon opinion sur la possibilité d'escalader le Wetterhorn de ce côté. j'aurais vraisemblablement déclaré la chose impossible.—DESOR.

TOWARDS the end of my tour in 1854, I was anxious to make some more considerable glacier expedition than I had been able to effect during the course of that journey. We were staying at Interlaken; and, as I gazed upon the graceful form of the Jungfrau, which rose opposite the window at which I sat, an irrepressible longing came over me to win that lofty and difficult summit, and look down upon the boundless prospect that must stretch on every side. I had crossed many a lofty col and wound my way among many a labyrinth of profound and yawning crevasses. I had slept on the moraine of a glacier, and on the

rough mountain-side; but I had never yet scaled any of those snowy peaks which rise in tempting grandeur above the crests of cols and the summits of the loftiest passes. The ascent of the Jungfrau would be an achievement that would worthily crown the autumn's campaign. I took Balmat¹ into my counsels, and he was delighted at the prospect. He could hardly conceal his satisfaction, though we agreed to say not a word about the matter until all was in train; and, in the course of the evening, he came to me in great exultation. He had fallen in with a Chamouni friend who had just terminated an engagement and was about to return home. He was one of the best mountaineers that could be found, Balmat said; of great strength, endurance, courage and prudence, and well acquainted with the glaciers, and would be of the greatest service in any difficult expedition. He was going to stay a day or two at Interlaken, for the chance of further employment, and Balmat would take care not to lose sight of him. I went out and had a chat with him, and found him a man of great size and strength, with an air of modest self-reliance which promised well. His name was Auguste Simond; but it was not long before we altered it to Sampson, on account of his powerful frame. Balmat said he had seen him hold out a man at the end of his arm.

The next day we made an excursion to Lauterbrunnen, to take counsel of Ulrich Lauener, the most

¹ *Balmat*. Auguste Balmat (1808-62), one of the most famous of the early Chamonix guides.—ED.

renowned guide of the Oberland, an elder brother of Christian who, two years before, had been my guide over the Tschingel Pass. Unfortunately he was gone to Grindelwald; and when we came back from a visit to the upper end of the valley, near the Schmadribach Fall (an expedition perfectly practicable for ladies, and of no common interest), he was still absent. We therefore left word for him to come the next day to Interlaken and seek us at the Hôtel de la Jungfrau. Accordingly, the following afternoon, on returning from the Giesbach Falls, we saw a tall, straight, active, knowing-looking fellow, with a cock's feather stuck jauntily in his high-crowned hat, whom I recognised at once as possessing the true Lauener cut, perched on the railings in front of the hotel, lazily dangling his long legs in the air. He was soon closeted with us, and questioned as to the possibility of ascending the Jungfrau. It could be done, he said, but would take six days, as we must go by way of the Grimsel to the back of the chain and ascend from the chalets of Merglen. This was an expenditure of time I was not prepared for, and I asked if we could not mount from the side of the Grimsel. He said it was possible in the height of the summer but not now; it was too late in the season. I asked if it could not be compassed by taking proper measures. He replied by an expressive shake of the head, and a "Nein, nein, Herr; man muss zwei Nächte am Gletscher schlafen; und die Nächte sind zu lange; es macht sehr kalt am Eis" ("No, no, sir; you must sleep two nights on the glacier, and the nights are too long;

it is very cold on the ice"). I knew something of what a night on the glacier meant, and could quite believe that, with the scanty stock of appliances we should be able to carry, and without the possibility of making a fire, the cold would probably be intolerable, and was reluctantly obliged to abandon the idea of reaching the summit of the Jungfrau that year. I then asked him if we could attempt the Finsteraarhorn or the Schreckhorn; but he made the same objection. The autumn was too far advanced to sleep on a glacier, which we must do in either case. The Wetterhorn next occurred to me, and I asked him if that were practicable. He answered with a ready "Ja, ja, Herr," adding that no one had yet succeeded in the ascent; but he thought it was possible, and at all events worth the trial.

The resolution was quickly taken; and we appointed to meet Lauener the next day, towards noon, at Grindelwald, whither he was to proceed early in the day to make all necessary preparations. The party was to consist of myself, with Lauener, Balmat and Simond for guides; and I gave Lauener authority to engage a porter, should he find it necessary so to do, to help in conveying to our sleeping-place whatever might be required. My wife was to stay with her brother, for that night, at Grindelwald, where we hoped to rejoin them the next evening. Sampson was now spoken to and retained; and, with a caution to the men to drop no hint of our project at Inter-laken, for fear we should ignominiously fail, we parted till the morrow.

Next morning (16 September, 1854) we started from Interlaken about eight, and proceeded by *voiture* to Grindelwald, which we found already full of the bustle of preparation. Many idlers were lounging about the doors of the inn, waiting our arrival; and the guides' room was full of people smoking, chattering, and crowding about Lauener, who was packing a great basket with ropes, crampons, and other necessities for an excursion of this sort. He called me aside and begged permission to retain another guide, one Peter Bohren, of Grindelwald, who he said had been three times this season to the plateau out of which the peaks of the Wetterhorn spring, and would, therefore, prove a valuable auxiliary. I was somewhat annoyed at having this additional expense put upon me, but did not like to oppose the wishes of the leading guide in such a matter, and assented; so that I had four guides, besides which we were obliged to hire a porter, as there was much to carry, making our party six in all. I ordered dinner for ourselves; and while it was getting ready, went again to look at the preparations. I was a little staggered at their magnitude, and at the serious air of the men, who were far more grave and quiet than is usual on such occasions; and I heard so much on every side of the difficulties and dangers we were to encounter, that I almost began to fear we were bent on a rash enterprise. However, I resolved we would run no foolish risks, and if we found the difficulties too great for us prudently to face, we would abandon the undertaking; but I was seriously afraid that,

when I was gone, the people would alarm my wife with exaggerated accounts of the horrors of our track.

The Chamouni men, who do these things in a more quiet and business-like manner than their fellows of the Oberland, were quite disgusted with the noise and confusion. Balmat said they made his head ache; and Sampson applied himself assiduously to encourage my wife, assuring her with a seriousness and solemnity which made us all laugh, that he would answer for my safety with his own, and that, if we did not run into danger, danger would not come to us. Altogether, I was glad when the hour of departure arrived. The landlord wrung Balmat's hand as we pushed our way through the crowd of loiterers and issued from the inn. "Try," said he, "to return all of you alive; but——" he broke off, and shook his head gravely. Lauener and Bohren had pressed me to allow them to take a *Flagge* with them to plant on the summit. I thought this seemed rather like a tempting of Nemesis, but yielded to their importunities; and they now told me it was not ready, and asked to wait for it. I inquired where it was being made, and was told, to my surprise, at the blacksmith's. It seemed an odd place to go to for a flag; but I supposed the blacksmith was some mechanic of a versatile genius, who would be applied to for everything out of the common way, and asked no more questions, but told them to stay behind for the flag and overtake the rest of us; and then, bidding adieu to my wife and her brother, I set off at once with Balmat and

Sampson, very glad to escape the honours and inconveniences of distinction.

It was half-past one when we left the door of the hotel; the sun was hot, and we walked slowly across the beautiful meadows which clothe the northern slopes of the valley of Grindelwald and give to it that character of mingled loveliness and grandeur for which it is so eminently distinguished, and in which, so far as I know, the valley of Fée is its only superior. Balmat and I chatted pleasantly on the many scenes of glory we had witnessed together in various parts of Switzerland and Sardinia; now and then we cast an upward glance at the great peak before us, and wondered whether we should find more difficulty in scaling the Wetterhorn than in descending the icy *arête* of the Findelen, whether we should be as well rewarded for our toil as we had been on that eventful day, and whether Lauener would prove as excellent a guide as our good friend of Saas. The moments flew quickly by, and in less than an hour we were overtaken by Bohren, who told us Lauener was still behind, but would be on our track.

A few minutes afterwards, we halted for a moment at a chalet near the foot of the glacier, where Bohren's father lived with a number of his almost numberless progeny, all of whom came forth and with much interest bid their brother and ourselves Godspeed. Bohren took it all very philosophically, borrowed a better pipe than his own, and a larger stock of tobacco, and set off again, smoking like a chimney-pot. Passing the end of the glacier, we made, first of all, for the

great wall of rock which forms the side of the Scheideck Pass, and after scrambling some distance up its face, by inequalities of the surface scarcely perceptible from below, gained a narrow goat-walk (known as the Enge) which hugs the brink of terrible precipices, often but an inch or two from the path, and is itself surmounted by others equally formidable, the base of which we could sometimes almost touch with one hand, while a pebble dropped from the other would fall hundreds of feet before it touched the earth. The path, however, when you are on it, does not look so bad as this description might seem to imply; little tufts of grass and brushwood grow freely on the edge of the precipice, and conceal from the eye its depth and its perpendicularity. This wild track leads, with little ascent, for about half an hour, back in a direction towards Grindelwald, till it arrives at the corner of the mountain which is almost as square as if it were the work of the mason; it there takes a turn, and continues along the other face of the mountain at right angles to its former course. At the angle there was a little platform of sloping turf, just large enough for us all to lay ourselves down in the sunshine while waiting for Lauener.

The view down the valley and towards the snowy heights beyond, with the cataract of ice beneath our feet, was abundantly striking; but my eye could not help wandering to the glittering spire of Grindelwald, as my imagination strove in vain to paint the scenes I should have gazed upon before I was welcomed back again by those I had left behind me. While we

lay on the grass, a magnificent avalanche came crashing down the precipices of the Schreckhorn, just across the glacier, and added to the great bank of dead white dust beneath, which told us that we looked upon a track which the avalanches were much wont to take. We had not long to wait; a loud, clear, ringing shout of greeting and a cheery laugh announced the presence of Lauener; and it did not require two glances to show why he had sought the blacksmith for the *Flagge*. Strapped on his back was a sheet of iron, three feet long and two feet wide, with two rings strongly welded to one of the shorter edges, and he stood leaning upon a bar of the same metal, ten or twelve feet long, and as thick as a man's thumb. He pointed, first to the *Flagge*, and then with an exulting look on high, and set up a shout of triumph which made the rocks ring again. Bohren took up the note, and presently a chorus of wild shouts came faintly borne on the air from the valley below. It was Bohren's affectionate relatives answering from the chalet at the foot of the glacier.

Balmat and Sampson were men of less boisterous spirit, and were far from delighted with either the *drapeau* or the shouting. Sampson went so far as to call the unwieldy iron machine, which cannot have weighed less than twenty or thirty pounds, a *bêtise* (which may be freely rendered "a confounded piece of nonsense"), and Balmat thought it would be time to shout when we were here again, the next evening, on our way down.

I could not help admiring Lauener's figure as he stood there, straight as an arrow, more than six feet high, spare, muscular, and active, health and vigour glowing in his open and manly countenance, his clear blue eye sparkling with vivacity and good temper, a slight dash of rough and careless swagger in his attitude and manner, which suited well with the wild scenery around and made him look like the genius of the place.

The path now directly overhangs the Upper Grindelwald glacier; for some distance you descend, in order to avoid a torrent which leaps down the precipices above, and which there is not room to pass, except near the edge of the glacier. After crossing this stream, you ascend by a bank of moraine, and afterwards, in a slanting direction, along the face of the cliff. The rock is marked in Desor's map as gneiss, but the footing is so bad that I took it for limestone, which is the very worst of all rocks to walk over. It is slippery and deceptive to a degree not readily understood by those who are not familiar with it. "Oh! le mauvais calcaire!" was an exclamation frequent enough on our lips when compelled to walk in difficult places upon this treacherous stone. In many spots, steps had been hewn in the smooth slopes or slabs of gneiss, without which it would have been very difficult and dangerous to traverse them. As it was, we slipped uncomfortably often, and were very glad to reach a small shoulder of the mountain, round which the glacier comes pouring from the left, and which is covered with a rich carpet of luxuriant

herbage, affording excellent pasturage to the numerous flocks which are driven hither, and into the valley behind, to fatten during the summer months. From this shoulder we had a few minutes of very steep descent, and then passed beneath a ridge of rocks which support, like a terrace, the valley we were seeking. Several clear streams pour in beautiful showers over the ledge thus formed. Above the head of one a delicate rainbow played fitfully—a glory placed there by the Eternal hand. Farther on, the ridge gave way to a bank of earth and boulder-stones, dotted with rocks rolled down from above, and occupying the bed of a broad valley. This valley was closed at the head by a glacier streaming from the base of the peak we aspired to climb, and by a wall of crags as hopeless, to all appearances, as the precipices of the Gemmi. On our right was a range of lofty rocks capped by the great plateau of ice, and on our left the ridge up whose opposite side we had fought our way, and behind which the glow of sunset had already flushed the western sky.

Half an hour's ascent over the herbage and among the boulders brought us to a stone under which we were to pass the night. It was a splendid wild scene—no distant prospect, but we were in the very heart of the crags and the ice—surrounded by some of the grandest glaciers and precipices in the Alps. I climbed alone a neighbouring height; the glacier by whose side we had ascended lay white and cold at its base; but the tints of the evening sky over the mountains which border the valley of Lauterbrunnen were won-

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derfully rich, while every peak and glacier around was bathed in a flood of purple:

O'er the vale

Light falls like a thick veil of golden motes,
And flings a glow, like a whole shower of roses,
Over the face of the vast precipice.
No sight beside, no motion and no sound—
Silence, the desert, and that solemn height.
. . . Heaven's eye, the falling sun,
Will soon be closed, and Darkness shall keep watch
Over her slumbering sister, Solitude.

I cast one look towards that majestic summit upon which I hoped, before to-morrow's sunset, to have stood, and returned to more practical cares and occupations, stimulated by a pleasing excitement, and filled with all that mingled wonder, delight and awe which takes possession of the soul when evening falls amidst the solemn silence of these Alpine fastnesses, and which no man can, or would, repress.

Night opes the noblest scenes, and sheds an awe,
Which gives these venerable scenes full weight,
And due reception in the intender's heart.

It was eight o'clock when we entered the cave; I lay uneasily for many hours, but at length I could endure it no longer; I spoke to Balmat, who was near me, and found he too was very uncomfortable, and we agreed to make our escape. We got across the sleepers somehow, knocked out the stones and emerged. Oh! how grateful was that cool fresh air! how refreshing that draught at the mountain torrent!

The stars were shining as I never saw them before in my life, like so many balls of fire in the black concave; the glaciers were sparkling in the soft light of the waning moon, now in her fourth quarter. It was just two o'clock, but not cold, and a bracing air blew briskly, yet pleasantly, from the north-west. I had been up before the sun many a morning, on many a mountain height, and had seen, I thought, almost every phase of Alpine night-scenery; but so beautiful a nocturnal view as this I never yet had beheld; it spoke well for the promise of the day. Presently some of the men came out, a fire was kindled, and tea and coffee made. I stripped and had a bathe in the dashing torrent; it was icy-cold, but did me more good than the weary night in the hole. Balmat and I were urgent with Lauener to start as early as possible, for we all expected a long day, and we wished to reach the snow while it was yet crisp; but he refused to start before half-past four, saying that in an hour we should reach the glacier, and that the moon was not bright enough to light us across it. It was still dark when, at the hour appointed, we set off, and for some time we groped our way by the help of a lantern. During the first hour and a half we mounted amongst a mass of debris, and amidst great boulders of rock which lie below, or form part of, the terminal moraine of the glacier. It was disagreeable walking in the dark, and we were frequently stumbling and falling. Long before we reached the glacier, day had begun to dawn, and a cold, clear grey was stealing over the sky.

Lo! on the eastern summit, clad in grey,
Morn, like a horseman girt for travel, comes;
And from his tower of mist
Night's watchman hurries down.

I could not help thinking, despite Lauener's precautions, that we might perfectly well have traversed the glacier before daybreak, as there was but one crevasse of any magnitude, which we crossed without much difficulty. We were nearly an hour upon the ice, on leaving which we approached the abrupt wall of rock I have spoken of before as affording the only means of access to the upper plateau. It turned out to be not absolutely precipitous, but full of small ledges and steep slopes covered with loose stones and schisty debris which gave way at every step. The substratum appeared to be a schistaceous gneiss, very friable and much disintegrated by the weather; so that every particle had to be tried before it was safe to trust hand or foot to it. It was extremely steep; very often the ledges which gave us foothold were but an inch or two wide, and throughout it was a marvel to me that rocks which, from a short distance off, looked such absolute precipices could be climbed at all. At length we came to a very singular formation. Standing out from a nearly perpendicular wall of rock were a series of thin parallel wedges of rock, planted, with the thin edge upwards, at right angles to the body of the mountain, and separated from one another by deep intervening clefts and hollows. Each of these was two or three hundred feet in height, seventy or eighty in width at the base, but narrowing

off to the thickness of a few inches, and presenting at the top a rough and jagged ridge, forty or fifty feet long, by which we must pass to reach the plateau which lay just beyond. We first climbed to the top of one of these wedges, and then had to make our way along its crest.

It was nervous work; a good head, a stout heart, a steady hand and foot were needed. Lauener went first, carrying a rope, which was stretched by the side of the ridge so as to form a protection to the next passer. Bohren went next; then came my own turn. It was certainly the worst piece of scrambling I ever did. The rock was much shattered by exposure to the frost and snow, and there was hardly a single immovable piece along the whole length. Every bit had to be tried before it was trusted to; and many were the fragments (some as large as a shoulder of mutton, and something of that shape) which came out when put to the test, and went crashing down till out of sight, making an avalanche of other stones as they fell. I passed my right arm over the top of the ridge, and thus secured myself, having the rock between my arm and my body, on one side, and the rope stretched below me, on the other. Everyone had to pass much in the same way, and it was a long quarter of an hour before we were all safely landed on the snow beyond.

A few minutes later we came to the brink of a precipice on the Grindelwald side, and here, for the first time to-day, we had a view of that rich and verdant valley, which looked lovelier than ever by

contrast with the desolation which surrounded us. We could not only distinguish the village, but, as we thought, the inn, which, with the telescope, we made out easily enough. It was from the brink of a dizzy height that we looked down; stones that we kicked over were out of sight in a moment, and were heard, at distant intervals, striking against the precipice as they fell, till the sound gradually died away in the silence of distance. A small quantity of black debris jutted out of the snow, upon which we sat down, at nine o'clock, to take our morning meal. I had been ill with indigestion all the way up, but thanks to the fresh air of the mountains was at length recovering, and felt quite ready for a meal; but, to my mortification, I found all the meat they had brought tainted with garlic—the object of my peculiar detestation. I could not eat a mouthful, and a crust of bread, from time to time, with a cup of mingled wine and snow, was all my food throughout this laborious day.

At this spot we left everything we had brought with us, except a flask of brandy and our alpenstocks. The sticks the Oberland men carried were admirably suited for their work. They were stout pieces of undressed wood, with the bark and knots still upon them, about four feet long, shod with a strong iron point at one end, and fixed at the other into a heavy iron head about four inches long each way; one arm being a sharp spike, with which to hew out the ice where needed, the other wrought into a flat blade with a broad point, something like a glazier's knife.

This part of the instrument was extremely useful in climbing rocks. It ran into clefts and fissures too high to be accessible, or too small to admit the hand, and, once well planted, formed a secure and certain support. This kind of alpenstock is hardly ever seen at Chamouni. Our ice-hatchet on the Col du Géant and the Col Imseng was perfectly different, though better adapted to the mere ice-work we had then to perform; and its great utility called forth repeated expressions of admiration from the Chamouni men, to whom it was new. The Swiss men put on their crampons and offered some to us; but we (that is Balmat, Sampson and myself) preferred the double-headed points I have mentioned before, of which we had brought a stock from Chamouni, and which we screwed into our boots. Crampons are hardly safe things to wear, unless you are accustomed to them, and I found Balmat, who knew perfectly well how to use them, uniformly reject them. We now fastened ourselves all together with ropes, and commenced the last ascent. It lay near the edge of a long and steep *arête* which connects the Mittelhorn with the Wetterhorn; at the place where we gained the plateau, the ridge was nearly level, but almost immediately began to rise sharply towards the peak. We were now at the back of the mountain, as seen from the valley of Grindelwald, which was, of course, completely hidden from the view. When we had stopped to take something to eat, we were at an extremity of the ridge which runs up to the actual summit, and, as it were, peeped round a corner. We were not to

see the valley again till we stood upon the summit.

The ascent was rapid, and commenced in deep snow; but it was not long before the covering of snow became thinner and the slope more rapid, and every minute a step or two had to be cut. In this way we zigzagged onwards for nearly an hour, in the course of which we made, perhaps, a thousand feet of ascent, having the satisfaction, every time we could look round, to see a wider expanse of prospect risen to view. About ten o'clock we reached the last rocks, which were a set of black, sloping, calcareous crags, whose inclination was hardly less than that of the glacier, left bare by the melting of the snow; they were much disintegrated by the weather, and the rough and shaly debris on their surface was, for the most part, soaked with the water that trickled from the snows above. Here we sat down and unharnessed ourselves. It was neither too hot nor too cold. A gentle breeze tempered the heat of the sun, which shone gloriously upon a sparkling sea of ice-clad peaks, contrasting finely with the deep blue of the cloudless heavens.

While we had been making our short halt at the edge of the plateau, we had been surprised to behold two other figures creeping along the dangerous ridge of rocks we had just passed. They were at some little distance from us, but we saw that they were dressed in the guise of peasants, and when we first perceived them, Lauener (who was a great hunter himself) shouted excitedly, "Gems-jägers!" but a moment's reflection convinced us that no chamois-hunter would

seek his game in this direction, and immediately afterwards we observed that one carried on his back a young fir-tree, branches, leaves and all. We had turned aside a little to take our refreshment, and while we were so occupied they passed us, and on our setting forth again, we saw them on the snow-slopes a good way ahead, making all the haste they could, and evidently determined to be the first at the summit. After all our trouble, expense and preparations, this excited the vehement indignation of my Chamouni guides — they declared that, at Chamouni, anyone who should thus dog the heels of explorers and attempt to rob them of their well-earned honours would be scouted; nor were they at all satisfied with the much milder view which the Oberlanders took of the affair. The pacific Balmat was exceedingly wroth, and muttered something about "coups de poings," and they at length roused our Swiss companions to an energetic expostulation. A great shouting now took place between the two parties, the result of which was, that the piratical adventurers promised to wait for us on the rocks above, whither we arrived very soon after them. They turned out to be two chamois-hunters who had heard of our intended ascent, and resolved to be even with us and plant their tree side by side with our *Flagge*. They had started very early in the morning, had crept up the precipices above the upper glacier of Grindelwald before it was light, had seen us soon after daybreak, followed on our trail and hunted us down. Balmat's anger was soon appeased

when he found they owned the reasonableness of his desire that they should not steal from us the distinction of being *the first* to scale that awful peak, and instead of administering the fisticuffs he had talked about, he declared they were *bons enfants* after all, and presented them with a cake of chocolate; thus the pipe of peace was smoked, and tranquillity reigned between the rival forces.

Once established on the rocks and released from the ropes, we began to consider our next operations. A glance upwards showed that no easy task awaited us. In front rose a steep curtain of glacier, surmounted, about five or six hundred feet above us, by an overhanging cornice of ice and frozen snow, edged with a fantastic fringe of pendants and enormous icicles. This formidable obstacle bounded our view and stretched from end to end of the ridge. What lay beyond it we could only conjecture; but we all thought that it must be crowned by a swelling dome, which would constitute the actual summit. We foresaw great difficulty in forcing this imposing barrier; but after a short consultation, the plan of attack was agreed upon and immediately carried into execution. Lauener and Sampson were sent forward to conduct our approaches, which consisted of a series of short zigzags, ascending directly from where we were resting to the foot of the cornice. The steep surface of the glacier was covered with snow, but it soon became evident that it was not deep enough to afford any material assistance. It was loose and uncompacted, and lay to the thickness of two or three inches only,

so that every step had to be hewn out of the solid ice. Lauener went first and cut a hole just sufficient to afford him a foothold while he cut another. Sampson followed and doubled the size of the step, so as to make a safe and firm resting-place. The line they took ascended, as I have said, directly above the rocks on which we were reclining, to the base of the overhanging fringe. Hence the blocks of ice, as they were hewn out, rolled down upon us, and shooting past, fell over the brink of the *arête* by which we had been ascending and were precipitated into a fathomless abyss beneath. We had to be on the *qui vive* to avoid these rapid missiles, which came accompanied by a very avalanche of dry and powdery snow. One, which I did not see in time, struck me a violent blow on the back of the head, which made me keep a better look out for its successors. I suggested that they should mount by longer zigzags, which would have the double advantage of sending the debris on one side, and of not filling up the footsteps already cut with the drifts of snow. Balmat's answer, delivered in a low, quiet tone, was conclusive: "Mais où tomberaient-ils, monsieur, si, par un malheur, ils glissaient? A présent, il y aurait la chance que nous pourrions les aider; mais si on glissait à côté—voilà, monsieur!" pointing to a block of ice which passed a little on one side and bounded into the frightful gulf.

For nearly an hour the men laboured intently at their difficult task, in which it was impossible to give them help; but at length they neared the cornice, and it was thought advisable that we should

begin to follow them. Balmat went first, then I, then Bohren, and the two chamois-hunters, who now made common cause with us, brought up the rear. We were all tied together. We had to clear out all the footholes afresh, as they were filled with snow. A few paces after starting, when we were clear of the rocks, I ascertained the angle of the slope by planting my alpenstock upright and measuring the distance from a given point in it to the slope, in two directions, vertically and horizontally. I found the two measurements exactly equal; so that the inclination of the glacier was 45 degrees; but at every step it became steeper, and when at length we reached the others, and stood, one below another, close to the base of the cornice, the angle of inclination was between 60 and 70 degrees. I could not help being struck with the marvellous beauty of the barrier which lay, still to be overcome, between us and the attainment of our hopes. The cornice curled over towards us like the crest of a wave, breaking at irregular intervals along the line into pendants and inverted pinnacles of ice, many of which hung down to the full length of a tall man's height. They cast a ragged shadow on the wall of ice behind, which was hard and glassy, not flecked with a spot of snow, and blue as the "brave o'erhanging" of the cloudless firmament. They seemed the battlements of an enchanted fortress, framed to defy the curiosity of man, and to laugh to scorn his audacious efforts.

A brief parley ensued. Lauener had chosen his course well, and had worked up to the most accessible

point along the whole line, where a break in the series of icicles allowed him to approach close to the icy parapet, and where the projecting crest was narrowest and weakest. It was resolved to cut boldly into the ice, and endeavour to hew deep enough to get a sloping passage on to the dome beyond. He stood close, not facing the parapet, but turned half round, and struck out as far away from himself as he could. A few strokes of his powerful arm brought down the projecting crest, which, after rolling a few feet, fell headlong over the brink of the *arête* and was out of sight in an instant. We all looked on in breathless anxiety; for it depended upon the success of this assault whether that impregnable fortress was to be ours, or whether we were to return, slowly and sadly, foiled by its calm and massive strength.

Suddenly a startling cry of surprise and triumph rang through the air. A great block of ice bounded from the top of the parapet, and before it had well lighted on the glacier, Lauener exclaimed, "Ich schaue den blauen Himmel!" ("I see blue sky!") A thrill of astonishment and delight ran through our frames. Our enterprise had succeeded! We were almost upon the actual summit. That wave above us, frozen, as it seemed, in the act of falling over, into a strange and motionless magnificence, was the very peak itself! Lauener's blows flew with redoubled energy. In a few minutes a practicable breach was made, through which he disappeared, and in a moment more the sound of his axe was heard behind the battlement under whose cover we stood. In his excitement he

had forgotten us, and very soon the whole mass would have come crashing on our heads. A loud shout of warning from Sampson, who now occupied the gap, was echoed by five other eager voices, and he turned his energies in a safer direction. It was not long before Lauener and Sampson together had widened the opening, and then at length we crept slowly on. As I took the last step, Balmat disappeared from my sight; my left shoulder grazed against the angle of the icy embrasure, while, on the right, the glacier fell abruptly away beneath me towards an unknown and awful abyss; a hand from an invisible person grasped mine; I stepped across, and had passed the ridge of the Wetterhorn!

The instant before, I had been face to face with a blank wall of ice. One step, and the eye took in a boundless expanse of crag and glacier, peak and precipice, mountain and valley, lake and plain. The whole world seemed to lie at my feet. The next moment I was almost appalled by the awfulness of our position. The side we had come up was steep, but it was a gentle slope compared with that which now fell away from where I stood. A few yards of glittering ice at our feet, and then, nothing between us and the green slopes of Grindelwald, nine thousand feet beneath. I am not ashamed to own that I experienced, as this sublime and wonderful prospect burst upon my view, a profound and almost irrepressible emotion—an emotion which, if I may judge by the low ejaculations of surprise, followed by a long pause of breathless silence, as each in turn stepped into the opening,

was felt by the others as well as myself. Balmat told me repeatedly afterwards, that it was the most awful and startling moment he had known in the course of his long mountain experience. We felt as in the more immediate presence of Him who had reared this tremendous pinnacle, and beneath the "majestical roof" of whose deep blue heaven we stood, poised, as it seemed, half-way between the earth and sky.

In a few minutes Lauener and Sampson had cut away a length of about ten feet of the overhanging cornice, and we hastened, for the sake of security, to place ourselves astride on the ridge that was exposed. It was a saddle, or more properly, a kind of knife-edge of ice; for I never sat on so narrow-backed a horse. We worked ourselves along this ridge, seated ourselves in a long row upon it, and untied the ropes. After a few minutes, when we had become more accustomed to the situation, I ventured to stand upright on that narrow edge—not four inches wide—and then at length I became fully aware of the extent and magnificence of the panorama. To the east and south lay a boundless sea of mighty peaks, stretching from the great Ortler Spitz and his giant companions of the Tyrol, in the solemn distance, past the fine group of the Monte Leone, the many summits of Monte Rosa, and the sharp peak of the Weisshorn, towards the western extremity of the Pennine chain. Mont Blanc was hidden behind the mountains of the Oberland, whose stupendous masses looked but a stone's-throw from us. Between us and the far-off snows of the Ortler Spitz lay group behind group of

the mountains of the Grisons and of Uri, green at the base, dark and craggy above, and capped by broken patches of glacier and snow, intersected by numerous deep and narrow valleys, at the foot of which tortuous mountain torrents and glacier streams glittered like silver threads.

The chamois-hunters and Bohren, while I was standing up, began an unearthly series of yells which broke discordantly upon the solemnity and silence of the scene; but the prudent Balmat instantly checked them, and I was glad of it, for the ringing shouts produced a strange and unpleasant effect upon the nerves, which must not now be disturbed unnecessarily. "*Il ne faut jamais s'écrier dans les hautes sommites,*" was Balmat's comment; "*on ne sait jamais ce qui peut arriver.*" Lauener did not need the caution; brave as a lion, active as a chamois, the best hunter and the best guide in the Oberland, he could hardly conceal a strong emotion. Balmat assured me—and neither did he, nor do I, mention it as any disparagement to his manliness—he saw him, and felt him, tremble like a child when he helped him through the gap. No wonder; his elder brother Johann, who was reputed a more bold and adventurous mountaineer than even Ulrich, had perished but a few months before, while hunting his favourite game, by slipping over the edge of a less dangerous precipice.

While I was standing on the ridge, where there was not room to place my two feet side by side, the guides were busy driving the long iron bar of the

Flagge into the solid ice. I took my turn at it for a minute; it was planted five or six feet deep in the glacier, and seemed firm enough to defy the tempest, even at this aerial height; the broad sheet of iron was fitted in its place, resting on a rim in the staff, on which it played freely; and, finally, was secured with a nut screwed on to the top. It was then turned towards Grindelwald, whence, as well as from all the country round, it long remained a conspicuous object. It was planted a few paces nearer to Grindelwald than the opening where the cornice was cut away, so as to have the white wall of snow behind for a background, by which means it was rendered far more easy to be seen. Side by side with it the chamois-hunters planted their green tree which had a strange appearance, as if growing vigorously out of a soil of ice. While standing up I dropped a glove; it rolled for a few yards down the bank of glacier on the Grindelwald side, and there rested against a crust of snow. Despite my earnest requests, and even commands, to the contrary, Bohren insisted upon cutting his way down and regaining it; a piece of folly and rashness of which I was an unwilling spectator.

We spent about twenty minutes on the summit; we arrived at twenty minutes past eleven, and remained till twenty minutes to twelve; long enough to impress indelibly upon the memory the immense and varied panorama we had beheld. It was now necessary to descend the slope by which we had mounted. Just as we were about to start, Sampson said, "Maintenant, à la garde de Dieu!" an observa-

tion for which Balmat took him severely to task. Balmat was right. No sound should have been uttered which could tend to shake the nerves or aid the imagination in magnifying the danger of the descent. I proposed that we should tie ourselves together again; but they all dissented, thinking, as they told me afterwards, that an accident to any one would, in that case, have involved the destruction of the whole party. Going down proved, as might be expected, a worse task than ascending; the difficulty and danger stared us in the face; it was a trial for the stoutest nerves to look down the steep curtain of glacier, on which a single slip might (perhaps must) have entailed fatal consequences. Balmat and Simond both urged me to descend with my face to the ice, so that I might not see what lay before me; but I felt confident of my own presence of mind, and preferred to look my work boldly in the face.

The descent was conducted with extreme caution. Before we took a step, we planted our alpenstocks firmly in the glacier and laid hold of them close to the snow, or cut holes with them into which we could put a couple of fingers, and so get a grasp of the ice. When we were about fifty yards on the way down, someone remembered that we had forgotten to drink the health of the Wetterhorn. The first impulse was unanimous, to return; but second thoughts told us that would be an unjustifiable imprudence, and we rectified the omission then and there, as we stood on the ice, each tossing off, bareheaded, a draught of brandy and snow to "the health of the

Wetterhorn." Then we continued our descent with the same care and deliberation, and in about half an hour reached the rocks on which we had lain so long while Lauener and Sampson were toiling at the steps. We looked back from this place with no small pride and satisfaction, for now the worst part of our day's work was over. Presently we were able to descend much more rapidly, and by about a quarter to one we were at the spot where we had left our provender. Here we sat down for a hearty meal, though I was still limited to bread. We shared our stock with the two hunters, who had brought little with them, and were very glad of some wine and meat, though flavoured with garlic. They had by this time completely established their character as *bons enfants*, and we were all the best friends possible. We drank again more solemnly and deliberately to "the health of the Wetterhorn," in a rousing bumper of iced red wine, and this time Balmat raised no objection to as loud a shout as human lungs could utter. Lauener astounded us all by the strength and clearness of his manly voice.

We now descended the *mauvais pas* slowly and cautiously, but relieved from the undesirable companionship of the sheep, and presently came in sight of the chalet where old Bohren and his family lived. They were not on the look out, as they did not expect us for several hours; but someone happened to catch sight of us, and they fired a salute of two guns to announce our safe approach. My wife and her brother were at that moment on the upper glacier,

exploring some of its beautiful deep blue caverns and crevasses. She had had a little chat with the old man as she went to the glacier, and he had pointed to the two cannons, ready loaded, with which he meant to greet us; but she could scarcely believe her ears, and thought it was a mistake, till there was a great bawling from the chalet and they shouted that they had seen us. She hurried to old Bohren's, and presently afterwards we again came in sight, and rested for a moment on the little platform of turf near the Enge. We were welcomed by the yells of the whole assembled family of Bohrens, not unworthily responded to by our Bohren and Lauener, who bawled themselves black in the face. We could distinguish the chalet easily enough, but hardly the figures. They were not, as we were, cut out sharply against a face of rock. Balmat, however, put my glass to his eye, and exclaimed: "*Voilà Madame, qui agite son mouchoir*"; and I fancied I saw a faint gleam of flickering white. Then he exclaimed again: "*Elle se cache derrière la grange; on va tirer encore,*" and, after a considerable interval, a faint report reached our ears. We put ourselves in motion again and rapidly traversed the Enge, and by a quarter-past five arrived at the turf beneath. We stopped for one moment to quaff our last draught of wine—a welcome refreshment after our energetic descent—and then set off at a run, and raced down the grassy slopes, leaping over several fences. I was ahead, and Lauener and I took a hedge at the same instant which divided the meadow from the path towards the Scheideck, when suddenly, and very

much to our mutual astonishment, we found ourselves within ten paces of my wife and her brother, who were strolling out to meet us. They could scarcely conceive, nor could we easily realise, that we had come from the summit in less than six hours, including an hour of rest.

1882

Alfred Wills

U. R. Sool.

II year

S. N. College

Srinagar

1915/16
10/3/53

The BIETSCHHORN (12,965 feet), a mountain of exceptional beauty of form, is another of the peaks of the Bernese Oberland chain. Its first ascent was made by Leslie Stephen in 1859, and is told in his own words on the following pages. Sir Leslie Stephen (1832-1904) was professionally a literary man—a critical writer, and editor for some years of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. He was also a magnificent mountaineer, and he has many first ascents to his credit. His book *The Playground of Europe* is one of the most delightful in all mountain literature.



THE FIRST ASCENT OF THE BIETSCHHORN

BY LESLIE STEPHEN

(From *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers.*)

THE Bietschhorn is a pyramidal mass, conspicuous all down the valleys of Saas and Zermatt. Its sharp needle-shaped summit is so remarkable that Mr. Ruskin picks it out as one of the (I think) five really pyramidal mountain-tops of the Alps, a statement of very questionable accuracy. The Blümlis Alp, on the other hand, seen from the Lake of Thun or the terrace at Berne, displays a noble curtain of glacier, pouring down from three summits of nearly equal height. These mountains, which look at each other across the low flat ridge of the Petersgrat, had one point of resemblance in the summer of 1859, viz. that no one had yet ascended either of them.

It was with a special view to the Blümlis Alp that I had crossed the Lötschsattel to Kippel, in the beginning of August 1859, in company with Messrs. W. and G. Mathews. After whittling at certain dried bits of stick, which are the prevailing substitutes for meat in those parts, accompanied by loaves whose consistency suggested that a Kippel father of a family would be doing a really humane action in giving his children stones for bread, we washed down our meal with draughts of vinegar, and went to call

upon the priest, one Lener. The priest was, he told us, a friend, and in some degree an imitator, of Imseng of Saas. He showed us a collection of sturdy alpenstocks and a rifle, an ancient and portentous weapon which he had formerly used against chamois. Proceeding to talk of the wonders of his village, he told us that he had attempted the ascent of the Bietschhorn the year before, and had been driven back within a few feet of the summit. The veracious Peter Bohren had since informed him that there was in England a society called the "Alpen" Club, and that its president had announced that the Bietschhorn must, could and should be ascended, and had even sworn a solemn oath that, if not ascended within the current year, he would come and do it himself. I confirmed the general accuracy of this report, and added that the secretary of the Club was already at Kandersteg, and would return with me in a few days to inspect the mountain. Next morning we crossed by the Petersgrat to Kandersteg, and (after resolving to postpone for the present our attack on the Blümlis Alp, which a hot summer had transformed into a mere pillar of ice), I returned to Kippel. Various circumstances prevented Hinchliff, whom I had gone to meet at Kandersteg, or any other friends, from joining me; as, however, I had expected to have a larger party, I had rather weakly consented to Lener's eager request to be allowed to engage two guides and two porters. He seemed to be somewhat perplexed to find so large a number of natives endowed with what he called *courage*. Some of the best mountaineers had

lately disappeared. One had been ordained priest, another had been married, and though a married man might do for a porter, he was not, in Lener's opinion, to be relied upon as guide. At last one Johann Zügler was sent for to act as guide, with a married brother to serve as porter. An old fellow, named Joseph Appener, was added, on the ground that his name was in "The Book"; the book being, of course, Murray. A youth, who seemed to be the priest's footman, curate, and slavey in general, completed the party. Next morning I started, in company with the priest, two of my very queer-looking guides, and a cat which volunteered at the last moment to follow us. The cat, however, was puzzled by a glacier stream, which we crossed in the dark by tumbling in on one side and out on the other, and ignominiously retreated with pitiful mews. Leaving Kippel at 4 a.m. we took to the southern side of the valley, and gradually ascended by the forests towards the foot of the Nest glacier. The day was just dawning as we left the forests and entered the clearing through which the stream flows from the Nest glacier. The Bietschhorn may be compared in shape to one of those four-sided steeples which terminate, not in a point, but in a short horizontal ridge, and which are in fact an exaggerated roof. The ridges marking the angles between the different sides of the spire correspond to the three or four great spurs which radiate from the summit of the Bietschhorn. We were about to attempt the ascent by following the spur which runs due north from the summit to form the eastern boundary of the Nest

glacier. A conspicuous mass of red rocks marks the point where this spur sinks into the broader buttress along which our ascent began, and the principal difficulty seemed to be the necessity of circumventing a great rocky tooth which, at this point, interrupted the continuity of the *arête*.

As we crossed the stream below the glacier a wild shout announced the approach of our remaining guides, and a queer lot they certainly were. They all appeared in full dress—dress-coats and “chimney-pot” hats, or such imitations of those civilised articles of torture as pass current in the Lötschenthal. A certain air of shabby respectability was thus communicated to the party, in singular contrast to the wild scenery around; and with our clerical guide in shorts and a shovel-hat, we had the appearance of being on our way to some outlandish Young Men’s Christian Association, rather than the ascent of a new mountain. The most singular characteristic of my guides was, perhaps, their conversational power. During the ten or twelve hours we passed together, they seemed to be conversing at the top of their voices in the unknown tongues, a few words of German dropping out at intervals with a discordant twang. I may as well say at once that I found one of them, Johann Zügler, to be a good mountaineer. Of the others, the less said the better.

We ascended over grass slopes, changing gradually to rocks and long patches of snow. They were tolerably easy to climb, but seemed to punish the poor old priest and his henchman severely. My guides had an

eccentric trick of getting so exceedingly animated in their conversation as to be obliged to sit down to have it out better. During these halts certain small barrels of wine circulated rapidly, whose contents were only attainable through the bung-hole. A glass had been carefully provided for the "Herr," the convenience of which was no doubt counterbalanced in their view by its transparency. The halts allowed the priest and his follower to catch us up occasionally, on which occasions the poor old gentleman began to complain of cramps in his legs, and to give other unmistakable symptoms of distress. I was obliged, however, to cut the halts as short as possible, as time was evidently of importance, and we pressed on without adventure till at 10 a.m. we reached a little snow col just below the rocky tooth I have already mentioned; once round this tooth I had little doubt of ultimate success, and I had been for some time impatient to reach it. My guides, however, to my no small irritation, considered this to be a favourable opportunity for a fuller explanation of their views to each other than any in which they had yet been able to indulge, and sat resolutely down with apparently the full intention of enjoying a comfortable chat. My impatience was increased by the fact that the weather was growing rapidly worse; masses of cloud were rolling up and concealing from view even the Aletschhorn glaciers which had till then been visible. Examining the rocks above us, I thought that they looked tolerably practicable, and began scrambling up by myself. The first step or two were

difficult, but I had hoisted myself over one or two obstacles when, looking round, I saw that the priest had come up and that my guides were preparing to start. Just at that moment my hand was on a large flat piece of rock, wedged in like a volume on a bookshelf between two others; I trusted my weight confidently to it, when, with a bound like a wild cat, it made a spring of some thirty feet through the air and caught poor Johann Zügler fairly on the side; a second bound took it right down the eastern cliffs, whilst Johann staggered over and subsided; fortunately for him a knapsack which he wore had guarded the blow, and received all the injury actually inflicted. It rather frightened us, however, and seemed to act strongly on the poor old priest's imagination. When you are following a man who is detaching loose stones, there are obviously only two courses open: either stick close to him, that the stones may not have accumulated much momentum, or keep as far off as possible. The priest unhesitatingly chose the latter alternative with regard to me; and I think this was the last we saw of him and his follower. Meanwhile I was joined by the remainder of the party, and the serious part of the climb began. It appeared to be impossible to keep along the ridge much farther, and we accordingly left it and proceeded horizontally along the face of the cliffs, above the upper plateau of the Nest glacier. Having turned the difficulty, we again struck directly upwards. The rocks we were now climbing sloped steeply above us, sometimes in sharp rib-like ridges, sometimes in broad

faces of rock intermixed with patches of snow. Loose crumbling stone, which gave way at every step we took, covered the whole mountain-side. Zügler was getting warmed to his work, and we raced each other up the rocks as hard as he, or at least as I, could go; he kept me at my full stretch—sometimes walking upright over an easy bit, sometimes using our hands, knees, and eyelids. The other two followed us in a state of profuse perspiration, and with their flow of talk perceptibly checked for the time. Behind us the stones went skipping and rattling down the rocks, starting heavy cannonades of avalanches, or starting off by themselves and going off with irregular rocket-like bounds over the ice and snow. "Isn't the Herr Pfarrer somewhere down there?" I asked. They thought he probably was, but that he most likely would get out of the way. They took occasion to add significantly that the Herr Pfarrer's infirmities had been the cause of their want of success in the previous year, and that the Herr Pfarrer's servant was a very bad man in difficult places. Meanwhile we progressed steadily, and at 11.15 a.m. reached once more the crest of the ridge. A long snow *arête*, like that of the Weisshorn, rose gradually from our standing-place to the top of the mountain. The long snow-slopes sank down on the east into the rolling mists below us, and on the west to the upper *névé* of the Nest glacier. A few yards below us on the western side ran a rocky ledge, broken by occasional couloirs of ice. The snow on the ridge was pretty firm, and Zügler led us with much courage and judgment, becoming, as I was

glad to see, more cheerful the farther we went and the wilder grew the cliffs amongst which we were wandering. Once or twice we left the actual ridge and slid down to the rocky ledge below us, rather a nervous feat, as there was nothing but bare ice under a thin covering of snow, and if once shot over the ledge we should have had a fair chance of being ground to powder. We followed the ridge without serious difficulty, till a couple of steps, cut across the last couloir with an axe, enabled me to grasp one of the huge broken rocks of the summit and land myself upon it at 12.30. I have been on wild enough mountaintops before and since, but I doubt whether I ever saw one so savage in appearance as that of the Bietschhorn. It consists of a ridge some hundred yards or so in length, with three great knobs, one at each end, and one at the middle—the articulations from which the great ribs of the mountain radiate. It was hard to say which of the three knobs was highest, and at first sight it also seemed hard to pass from one to the other. The sharp-backed rocky ridge was splintered and torn into the wildest confusion. It looked like the mockery of a parapet, in which the disfigured ruins of grotesque images were represented by the distorted pinnacles and needles of rock. The cliffs on each side sank steeply down into the broken masses of cloud which concealed from us all distant views; and the distant views from the Bietschhorn must, as Mr. Ball remarks in his *Alpine Guide*, be some of the most beautiful in the Alps. Some compensation for the loss might

be derived, as is often the case, from the extreme wildness of the immediate prospect of jagged black cliffs emerging in every variety of grim distortion from the heavy masses of cloud. We waited more than an hour in hopes of obtaining a fairer view, and employed the time in erecting three cairns on the three rival summits. Not a glimpse of the distance was vouchsafed to us, and at last we turned reluctantly to retreat, with a vow on my part to return some day for better luck. I was rather out of training, and was conscious of a strong disposition in my legs to adopt independent lines of action, which could not be too severely reprehended. I felt rather nervous on commencing the snow *arête*, and made a stumble nearly at the first step. Old Appener, emitting a fiendish chuckle, instantly gripped my coat-tails—with the benevolent intention, as I am willing to believe, of helping me, and not of steadying himself. If so, his design was better than his execution. He did not progress very rapidly, and whenever I made a longer step than usual, the effect of his manœuvre was to jerk me suddenly into a sitting position on the ice. I denounced the absurdity of his actions, both in German and dumb-show, but, as I only elicited more chuckles and a firmer grip of my coat-tails, I finally abandoned myself to my fate, and was truly thankful when, at the end of the *arête*, my equilibrium ceased to be affected by the chances of tumbling down a precipice on either side, or being lugged over backwards by a superannuated and inarticulate native. The descent was only varied by one incident.

My legs having developed more decidedly erratic propensities, ended by deserting their proper sphere of duty altogether during a race down the rocks. I consequently found myself sliding at railway pace, on my back, over a mixture of ice and rough stones, and was much gratified on being stopped by an unusually long and pointed rock, which ran through my trousers into my thigh and brought me up with a jerk. My pace was rather slackened by this incident, and we finally reached Kippel at 7.30, where old Lener, on the ground that it was a fast-day, provided me with a dinner consisting entirely of soup and cabbage stalks. The latter, with the benevolent wish not to hurt his feelings, I was compelled to bestow surreptitiously on the cat. Poor old Lener is now, I believe, dead. I hope that some enterprising innkeeper may, before long, offer better hospitality to those who visit the Lötschenthal.

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The WEISSHORN (14,804 feet) is one of the huge peaks which tower over the valley of Zermatt. It is among the Pennine Alps, the chain which includes Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa, the Matterhorn, and indeed practically all the highest mountains of the Alps.

John Tyndall describes the first ascent of 1861 in the essay that follows. He was led by Joseph Benen, one of the most famous of Swiss guides, who was killed three years later through a slip on the *Haut de Cry*. Professor Tyndall (1820-93) was a distinguished physicist and an F.R.S. He was a man of great force of personality and physical courage, and a true mountain-lover. His writings reveal a charming and modest disposition. Primarily a scientist in his outlook and indefatigable in his efforts to make first-hand observations, he was "humanistic" in his attitude towards mountains; reading between the lines, one feels that on his big expeditions the peak comes first, the scientific exploration a good second.



THE FIRST ASCENT OF THE WEISSHORN

BY JOHN TYNDALL

(From *Mountaineering in 1861.*)

In his own loom's garment drest,
By his proper bounty blest,
Fast abides this constant giver,
Pouring many a cheerful river,
To far eyes an aerial isle,
Unploughed, which finer spirits pile;
Which morn, and crimson evening, paint
For bard, for lover, and for saint;
The country's core,
Inspirer, prophet, evermore!

ON Friday, 16 August,¹ I rose at 4.30 a.m.; the eastern heaven was hot with the glow of the rising sun, and against the burning sky the mountain outlines were most impressively drawn. At 5.30 I bade good-bye to the excellent little *auberge*, and engaging a porter to carry my knapsack, went straight down the mountain towards Briegg. Beyond the end of the present ice the land gives evidence of vast glacier operations. It is scooped into hollows and raised into mounds; long ridges, sharpening to edges at the top, indicating the stranded moraines of the ancient glacier. And these hollows, and these hills, over

¹ 1861.—ED.

which the ice had passed, destroying every trace of life which could possibly find a lodgment in them, were now clothed with the richest verdure. And not to vegetable life alone did they give support, for a million grylli¹ chirruped in the grass. Rich, sapid meadows spread their emerald carpets in the sun; nut-trees and fruit-trees glimmered as the light fell upon their quivering leaves. Thus sanative Nature healed the scars which she had herself inflicted. The road is very rough a part of the way to Briegg; let us trust that before your arrival it will be improved. I took the diligence to Visp, and engaged a porter immediately to Randa. I had sent Benen² thither, on reaching the Bel Alp, to seek out a resting-place whence the Weisshorn might be assailed. On my arrival I learned that he had made the necessary reconnaissance, and entertained hopes of our being able to gain the top.

This noble mountain had been tried on various occasions and from different sides by brave and competent men, but had never been scaled; and from the entries in the travellers' books I might infer that formidable obstacles stood in the way of a successful ascent. The peak of the mountain is not visible at Randa, being far withdrawn behind the Alps. Beyond the Biezbach its ramparts consist of a craggy slope crowned above by three tiers of rocky strata. In front of the hotel is a mountain slope with pines clinging to its ledges, while stretching across the couloir of the Biezbach the divided ramparts are connected by

¹ Crickets.

² See preliminary note, p. 98.—ED.

battlements of ice. A quantity of debris which has been carried down the couloir spreads out in the shape of a fan at the bottom; near the edge of this debris stands a group of dingy houses, and close alongside them our pathway up the mountain runs.

Previous to quitting Randa I had two pair of rugs sewed together so as to form two sacks. These and other coverlets intended for my men, together with our wine and provisions, were sent on in advance of us. At 1 p.m., on 18 August, we, that is Benen, Wenger and myself, quitted the hotel, and were soon zigzagging among the pines of the opposite mountain. Wenger had been the guide of my friend F., and had shown himself so active and handy on the Strahleck, that I commissioned Benen to engage him. During the previous night I had been very unwell, but I hoped that the strength left me, if properly applied, and drained to the uttermost, would still enable me to keep up with my companions. As I climbed the slope I suffered from intense thirst, and we once halted beside a fillet of clear spring water to have a draught. It seemed powerless to quench the drought which beset me. We reached a chalet; milking-time was at hand, at our request a smart young Senner caught up a pail, and soon returned with it full of delicious milk. It was poured into a small tub. With my two hands I seized the two ends of a diameter of this vessel, gave it the necessary inclination, and stooping down, with a concentration of purpose which I had rarely before exerted, I drew the milk into me. Thrice I returned

to the attack before that insatiate thirst gave way. The effect was astonishing. The liquid appeared to lubricate every atom of my body, and its fragrance to permeate my brain. I felt a growth of strength at once commence within me; all anxiety as to physical power with reference to the work in hand soon vanished, and before retiring to rest I was able to say to Benen, "Go where thou wilt to-morrow, and I will follow thee."

Two hours' additional climbing brought us to our bivouac. A ledge of rock jutted from the mountain-side, and formed an overhanging roof. On removing the stones from beneath it, a space of comparatively dry clay was laid bare. This was to be my bed, and to soften it Wenger considerably stirred it up with his axe. The position was excellent, for lying upon my left side I commanded the whole range of Monte Rosa, from the Mischabel to the Breithorn. We were on the edge of an amphitheatre. Beyond the Schallenberg was the stately Mettelhorn. A row of eminent peaks swept round to the right, linked by lofty ridges of cliffs, thus forming the circus in which the Schallenberg Glacier originated. They were, however, only a spur cast out from the vaster Weisshorn, the cone of which was not visible from our dormitory. I wished to examine it, and in company with Benen skirted the mountain for half an hour, until the whole colossal pyramid stood facing us. When I first looked at it my hope sank, but both of us gathered confidence from a more lengthened gaze. The mountain is a pyramid with three faces, the intersections of

which form three sharp edges or *arêtes*. The end of the eastern *arête* was nearest to us, and on it our attention was principally fixed. A couloir led up to it filled with snow, which Benen, after having examined it with the telescope, pronounced "furchtbar steil."¹ This slope was cut across by a bergschrund, which we also carefully examined, and finally Benen decided on the route to be pursued next morning. A chastened hope was predominant in both our breasts as we returned to our shelter.

Water was our first necessity; it seemed everywhere, but there was none to drink. It was locked to solidity in the ice and snow. The sound of it came booming up from the Vispbach, as it broke into foam or rolled its boulders over its waterworn bed; and the swish of many a minor streamlet mingled with the muffled roar of the large one. Benen set out in search of the precious liquid, and after a long absence returned with a jug and panful. I had been particular in including tea in our list of provisions; but on opening the parcel we found it half green, and not to be indulged in at a moment when the main object of one's life was to get an hour's sleep. We rejected the tea and made coffee instead. At our evening meal the idea of toasting our cheese occurred to Wenger, who is a man rich in expedients of all kinds. He turned the section of a large cheese towards the flame of our pine-fire; it fizzed and blistered and turned viscous, and the toasted surface being removed was consumed with relish by us all. Our meal being

¹ "Frightfully steep."—ED.

ended and our beds arranged, by the help of Benen, I introduced myself into my two sacks in succession, and placed a knapsack beneath my head for a pillow. The talk now ceased and sleep became the object of our devotions.

But the goddess flies most shyly where she is most intensely wooed; still I think she touched my eyes gently once or twice during the night. The sunset had been unspeakably grand, steeping the zenith in violet, and flooding the base of the heavens with crimson light. Immediately opposite to us, on the other side of the valley of St. Nicholas, rose the Mischabel, with its two great peaks, the Grubenhorn and the Täschhorn, each barely under 15,000 feet in height. Next came the Alphubel, with its flattened crown of snow; then the Alleleinhorn and Rympfischhorn encased in glittering enamel; then the Cima di Jazzi; next the mass of Monte Rosa, with nothing competent to cast a shadow between it and the sun, and consequently flooded with light from bottom to top. The face of the Lyskamm turned towards us was for the most part shaded, but here and there its projecting portions jutted forth like red-hot embers as the light fell upon them. The "Twins" were most singularly illuminated; across the waist of each of them was drawn a black bar produced by the shadow of a corner of the Breithorn, while their white bases and whiter crowns were exposed to the sunlight. Over the rugged face of the Breithorn itself the light fell as if in splashes, igniting its glaciers and swathing its black crags in a layer of transparent red. The

Mettelhorn was cold, so was the entire range over which the Weisshorn ruled as king, while the glaciers which they embraced lay grey and ghastly in the twilight shade.

The sun is going, but not yet gone, while up the arch of the opposite heavens the moon, within one day of being full, is hastening to our aid. She finally appears exactly behind the peak of the Rympfischhorn: the cone of the mountain being projected for a time as a triangle on the disk. Only for a moment, however; for the queenly orb sails aloft, clears the mountain, and bears splendidly away through the tinted sky. The motion was quite visible, and resembled that of a vast balloon. As the day approached its end the scene assumed the most sublime aspect. All the lower portions of the mountains were deeply shaded, while the loftiest peaks, ranged upon a semi-circle, were fully exposed to the sinking sun. They seemed pyramids of solid fire, while here and there long stretches of crimson light drawn over the higher snowfields linked the glorified summits together. An intensely illuminated geranium flower seems to swim in its own colour which apparently surrounds the petals like a layer, and defeats by its lustre any attempt of the eye to seize upon the sharp outline of the leaves. A similar effect was here observed upon the mountains; the glory did not seem to come from them alone, but seemed also effluent from the air around them. This gave them a certain buoyancy which suggested entire detachment from the earth. They swam in splendour, which intoxicated the soul,

* D

Khushi Ram Soni

P. H. Soni

and I will not now repeat in my moments of soberness the extravagant analogies which then ran through my brain. As the evening advanced, the eastern heavens low down assumed a deep purple hue, above which, and blending with it by infinitesimal gradations, was a belt of red, and over this again zones of orange and violet. I walked round the corner of the mountain at sunset, and found the western sky glowing with a more transparent crimson than that which overspread the east. The crown of the Weisshorn was embedded in this magnificent light. After sunset the purple of the east changed to a deep neutral tint, and against the faded red which spread above it, the sun-forsaken mountains laid their cold and ghastly heads. The ruddy colour vanished more and more; the stars strengthened in lustre, until finally the moon and they held undisputed possession of the blue grey sky.

I lay with my face turned towards the moon until it became so chilled that I was forced to protect it by a light handkerchief. The power of blinding the eyes is ascribed to the moonbeams, but the real mischief is that produced by radiation from the eyes into clear space, and the inflammation consequent upon the chill. As the cold increased I was fain to squeeze myself more and more underneath my ledge, so as to lessen the space of sky against which my body could radiate. Nothing could be more solemn than the night. Up from the valley came the low thunder of the Vispbach. Over the Dom flashed in succession the stars of Orion, until finally the entire

constellation hung aloft. Higher up in heaven was the moon, and her rays as they fell upon the snow-fields and pyramids were sent back in silvery lustre by some, while others remained dull. These, as the orb sailed round, came duly in for their share of the glory. The Twins caught it at length and retained it long, shining with a pure spiritual radiance while the moon continued to ride above the hills.

I looked at my watch at 12 o'clock; and a second time at 2 a.m. The moon was then just touching the crest of the Schallenberg, and we were threatened with the withdrawal of her light. This soon occurred. We rose at 2.15 a.m., consumed our coffee, and had to wait idly for the dawn. A faint illumination at length overspread the east, and with this promise of the coming day we quitted our bivouac at 3.30 a.m. No cloud was to be seen; as far as the weather was concerned we were sure to have fair play. We rounded the shingly shoulder of the mountain to the edge of a snowfield, but before entering upon it I disburthened myself of my strong shooting-jacket, and left it on the mountain-side. The sunbeams and my own exertion would, I knew, keep me only too warm during the day. We crossed the snow, cut our way through a piece of entangled glacier, reached the bergschrund, and passed it without a rope. We ascended the frozen snow of the couloir by steps, but soon diverged from it to the rocks at our right, and scaled them to the end of the eastern *arête* of the mountain.

Here a saddle of snow separates us from the next

higher rocks. With our staff-spikes at one side of the saddle, we pass by steps cut upon the other. The snow is firmly congealed. We reach the rocks, which we find hewn into fantastic turrets and obelisks, while the loose chips of this colossal sculpture are strewn confusedly upon the ridge. Amid the chips we cautiously pick our way, winding round the towers or scaling them amain. From the very first the work is heavy, the bending, twisting, reaching and drawing up calling upon all the muscles of the frame. After two hours of this work we halt, and looking back we observe two moving objects on the glacier below us. At first we take them to be chamois, but they are instantly pronounced men, and the telescope at once confirms this. The leader carries an axe, and his companion a knapsack and alpenstock. They are following our traces, losing them apparently now and then, and waiting to recover them. Our expedition had put Randa in a state of excitement, and some of its best climbers had come to Benen and urged him to take them with him. But this he did not deem necessary, and now here were two of them determined to try the thing on their own account; and perhaps to dispute with us the honour of the enterprise. On this point, however, our uneasiness was small.

Resuming our gymnastics, the rocky staircase led us to the flat summit of a tower, where we found ourselves cut off from a similar tower by a deep gap bitten into the mountain. Retreat appeared inevitable, but it is wonderful how many ways out of difficulty

open to a man who diligently seeks them. The rope is here our refuge. Benen coils it round his waist, scrapes along the surface of the rock, fixes himself on a ledge, where he can lend me a helping hand. I follow him, Wenger follows me, and in a few minutes all three of us stand in the middle of the gap. By a kind of screw motion we twist ourselves round the opposite tower, and reach the *arête* behind it. Work of this kind, however, is not to be performed by the day, and with a view of sparing our strength, we quit the *arête* and endeavour to get along the southern slope of the pyramid. The mountain is here scarred by longitudinal depressions which stretch a long way down it. These are now filled with clear, hard ice, produced by the melting and re-freezing of the snow. The cutting of steps across these couloirs proves to be so tedious and fatiguing, that I urge Benen to abandon it and try the *arête* once more. By a stout tug we regain the ridge and work along it as before. Here and there, from the northern side, the snow has folded itself over the crags, and along it we sometimes work upward. The *arête* for a time has become gradually narrower, and the precipices on each side more sheer. We reach the end of one of the subdivisions of the ridge, and find ourselves separated from the next rocks by a gap about twenty yards across. The *arête* here has narrowed to a mere wall, which, however, as rock would present no serious difficulty. But upon the wall of rock is placed a second wall of snow, which dwindles to a knife-edge at the top. It is white and pure, of very fine grain, and a

little moist. How to pass this snow catenary I knew not, for I had no idea of a human foot trusting itself upon so frail a support. Benen's practical sagacity was, however, greater than mine. He tried the snow by squeezing it with his foot, and to my astonishment commenced to cross. Even after the pressure of his feet the space he had to stand on did not exceed a handbreath. I followed him, exactly as a boy walking along a horizontal pole, with toes turned outwards. Right and left the precipices were appalling; but the sense of power on such occasions is exceedingly sweet. We reached the opposite rock, and here a smile rippled over Benen's countenance as he turned towards me. He knew that he had done a daring thing, though not a presumptuous one. "Had the snow," he said, "been less perfect, I should not have thought of attempting it, but I knew after I had set my foot upon the ridge that we might pass without fear."

It is quite surprising what a number of things the simple observation made by Faraday,¹ in 1846, enables us to explain. Benen's instinctive act is justified by theory. The snow was fine in grain, pure and moist. When pressed, the attachments of its granules were innumerable, and their perfect cleanness enabled them to freeze together with a maximum energy. It was this freezing together of the particles at innumerable points which gave the mass its sustaining power. Take two fragments of ordinary table-ice and bring them carefully together: you will find that they freeze

¹ Michael Faraday, the scientist.—Ed.

and cement themselves at their place of junction; or if two pieces float in water, you can bring them together, when they instantly freeze, and by laying hold of either of them gently you can drag the other after it through the water. Imagine such points of attachment distributed without number through a mass of snow. The substance becomes thereby a semi-solid instead of a mass of powder. My guide, however, unaided by any theory, did a thing from which I, though backed by all the theories in the world, should have shrunk in dismay.

After this, we found the rocks on the ridge so shaken to pieces that it required the greatest caution to avoid bringing them down upon us. With all our care, however, we sometimes dislodged vast masses which leaped upon the slope adjacent, loosened others by their shock, these again others, until finally a whole flight of them would escape, setting the mountain in a roar as they whizzed and thundered along its side to the snowfields four thousand feet below us. The day is hot, the work hard, and our bodies are drained of their liquids as by a Turkish bath. The perspiration trickles down our faces, and drops profusely from the projecting points. To make good our loss we halt at intervals where the melted snow forms a liquid vein, and quench our thirst. We possess, moreover, a bottle of champagne, which, poured sparingly into our goblets on a little snow, furnishes Wenger and myself with many a refreshing draught. Benen fears his eyes, and will not touch champagne. The less, however, we rest the better, for after every

pause I find a certain unwillingness to renew the toil. The muscles have become set, and some minutes are necessary to render them again elastic. But the discipline is first-rate for both mind and body. There is scarcely a position possible to a human being which, at one time or another during the day, I was not forced to assume. The fingers, wrist and forearm were my main reliance, and as a mechanical instrument the human hand appeared to me this day in a light which it never assumed before. It is a miracle of constructive art.

We were often during the day the victims of illusions regarding the distance which we had to climb. For the most part the summit was hidden from us, but on reaching the eminences it came frequently into view. After three hours spent on the *arête*, about five hours, that is, subsequent to starting, the summit was clearly in view; we looked at it over a minor summit, which gave it an illusive proximity. "You have now good hopes," I remarked, turning to Benen. "Not only good hopes," he replied, "but I do not allow myself to entertain the idea of failure." Well, six hours passed on the *arête*, each of which put in its inexorable claim to the due amount of mechanical work; the lowering and the raising of three human bodies through definite spaces, and at the end of this time we found ourselves apparently no nearer to the summit than when Benen's hopes cropped out in confidence. I looked anxiously at my guide as he fixed his weary eyes upon the distant peak. There was no confidence in the expression of

his countenance; still I do not believe that either of us entertained for a moment the thought of giving in. Wenger complained of his lungs, and Benen counselled him several times to stop and let him and me continue the ascent; but this the Oberland man refused to do. At the commencement of a day's work I often find myself anxious, if not timid; but this feeling vanishes when I become warm and interested. When the work is very hard, we become callous and sometimes stupefied by the incessant knocking about. This was my case at present, and I kept watch lest my indifference should become carelessness. I supposed repeatedly a case where a sudden effort might be required of me, and felt all through that I had a fair residue of strength to fall back upon. I tested this conclusion sometimes by a spurt; flinging myself suddenly from rock to rock, and thus proved my condition by experiment instead of relying on opinion. An eminence in the ridge which cut off the view of the summit was now the object of our exertions. We reached it; but how hopelessly distant did the summit appear! Benen laid his face upon his axe for a moment; a kind of sickly despair was in his eye as he turned to me, remarking, "*Lieber Herr, die Spitze ist noch sehr weit oben.*"¹

Lest the desire to gratify me should urge him beyond the bounds of prudence, I said to Benen that he must not persist on my account, if he ceased to feel confidence in his own powers; that I should cheerfully return with him the moment he thought

¹ "The peak is still a very long way above us, sir."—ED.

it no longer safe to proceed. He replied that, though weary, he felt quite sure of himself, and asked for some food. He had it, and a gulp of wine, which mightily refreshed him. Looking at the mountain with a firmer eye, he exclaimed, "Herr! wir müssen ihn haben,"¹ and his voice, as he spoke, rung like steel within my heart. I thought of Englishmen in battle, of the qualities which had made them famous: it was mainly the quality of not knowing when to yield; of fighting for duty even after they had ceased to be animated by hope. Such thoughts had a dynamic value, and helped to lift me over the rocks. Another eminence now fronted us, behind which, how far we knew not, the summit lay. We scaled this height, and above us, but clearly within reach, a silvery pyramid projected itself against the blue sky. I was assured ten times by my companions that it was the highest point before I ventured to stake my faith upon the assertion. I feared that it also might take rank with the illusions which had so often beset our ascent, and shrunk from the consequent moral shock. Towards the point, however, we steadily worked. A large prism of granite, or granitic gneiss, terminated the *arête*, and from it a knife-edge of pure white snow ran up to a little point. We passed along the edge, reached that point, and instantly swept with our eyes the whole range of the horizon. The crown of the Weisshorn was underneath our feet.

The long pent feelings of my two guides found vent in a wild and reiterated cheer. Benen shook his arms

¹ "Sir! We *must* get him!"

in the air and shouted as a Valaisian, while Wenger chimed in with the shriller yell of the Oberland. We looked along the *arête*, and, far below perched on one of its crags, could discern the two Randa men. Again and again the roar of triumph was sent down to them. They had accomplished but a small portion of the ridge, and soon after our success they wended their way homewards. They came, willing enough, no doubt, to publish our failure had we failed; but we found out afterwards that they had been equally strenuous in announcing our success; they had seen us, they affirmed, like three flies upon the summit of the mountain. Both men had to endure a little persecution for the truth's sake, for nobody in Randa would believe that the Weisshorn could be scaled, and least of all by a man who for two days previously had been the object of Philomène, the waitress's, constant pity, on account of the incompetence of his stomach to accept all that she offered for its acceptance. The energy of conviction with which the men gave their evidence had, however, convinced the most sceptical before we arrived ourselves.

Benen wished to leave some outward and visible sign of our success on the summit. He deplored having no flag; but as a substitute it was proposed that he should knock the head off his axe, use the handle as a flagstaff, and surmount it by a red pocket-handkerchief. This was done, and for some time subsequently the extempore banner was seen flapping in the wind. To his extreme delight, it was shown to Benen himself three days afterwards by my friend

Mr. Galton from the Riffel Hotel. But you will desire to know what we saw from the summit, and this desire I am sorry to confess my total incompetence to gratify. I remember the picture, but cannot analyse its parts. Every Swiss tourist is acquainted with the Weisshorn. I have long regarded it as the noblest of all the Alps, and many, if not most other travellers, have shared this opinion. The impression it produces is in some measure due to the comparative isolation with which its cone juts into the heavens. It is not masked by other mountains, and all around the Alps its final pyramid is in view. Conversely the Weisshorn commands a vast range of prospect. Neither Benen nor myself had ever seen anything at all equal to it. The day, moreover, was perfect; not a cloud was to be seen; and the gauzy haze of the distant air, though sufficient to soften the outlines and enhance the colouring of the mountains, was far too thin to obscure them. Over the peaks and through the valleys the sunbeams poured, unimpeded save by the mountains themselves, which in some cases drew their shadows in straight bars of darkness through the illuminated air. I had never before witnessed a scene which affected me like this. Benen once volunteered some information regarding its details, but I was unable to hear him. An influence seemed to proceed from it direct to the soul; the delight and exultation experienced were not those of Reason or of Knowledge, but of BEING: I was part of it and it of me, and in the transcendent glory of nature I entirely forgot myself as man.

Suppose the sea waves exalted to nearly a thousand times their normal height, crest them with foam, and fancy yourself upon the most commanding crest, with the sunlight from a deep blue heaven illuminating such a scene, and you will have some idea of the form under which the Alps present themselves from the summit of the Weisshorn. East, west, north and south, rose those "billows of a granite sea," back to the distant heaven, which they hacked into an indented shore. I opened my notebook to make a few observations, but I soon relinquished the attempt. There was something incongruous, if not profane, in allowing the scientific faculty to interfere where silent worship was the "reasonable service."

The MATTERHORN (14,700 feet) is the most romantic of all mountains, excepting Everest alone, partly because of its long-sustained reputation for inaccessibility, and partly on account of its magnificent appearance. It is a peak *par excellence*—there is no easy way up—and its imposing steepness makes it look higher than it is; indeed it was for long reputed to be the highest mountain in the world.

The story of its conquest is dramatic in the extreme—there seemed, wrote Whymper, “to be a cordon drawn round it, up to which one might go, but no farther”—and during the years 1850–65 repeated attempts failed (Whymper himself made no fewer than seven unsuccessful assaults). For this story there is not room here; suffice it to say that Whymper, with the guides Michel Croz and the two Taugwalders, made the first ascent from the Swiss side in 1865; Jean Carrel, the Italian guide, who of all men deserved by his perseverance and enthusiasm to be first on the top, had to be content with the second ascent, by the Italian ridge.

Whymper's triumph, as will emerge in the following pages, was marred by a terrible disaster in the descent, but none the less his achievement stands as one of the finest in the history of mountaineering, a fitting climax to the career of the most famous of all mountaineers. He was born in 1840, and died in 1911. His best-known books are *Scrambles amongst the Alps*, from which this account is reprinted, and *Travels amongst the Great Andes of the Equator*.

THE ASCENT OF THE MATTERHORN

BY EDWARD WHYMPEL

(From *Scrambles amongst the Alps.*)

Had we succeeded well,
We had been reckoned 'mongst the wise: our minds
Are so disposed to judge from the event.

EURIPIDES.

It is a thoroughly unfair, but an ordinary custom, to praise or blame designs (which in themselves may be good or bad) just as they turn out well or ill. Hence the same actions are at one time attributed to earnestness and at another to vanity.—PLINY MIN.

WE started from Zermatt on 13 July, at 5.30, on a brilliant and perfectly cloudless morning. We were eight in number—Croz, old Peter and his two sons,¹ Lord F. Douglas, Hadow, Hudson,² and I. To ensure

¹ The two young Taugwalders were taken as porters, by desire of their father, and carried provisions amply sufficient for three days, in case the ascent should prove more troublesome than we anticipated.

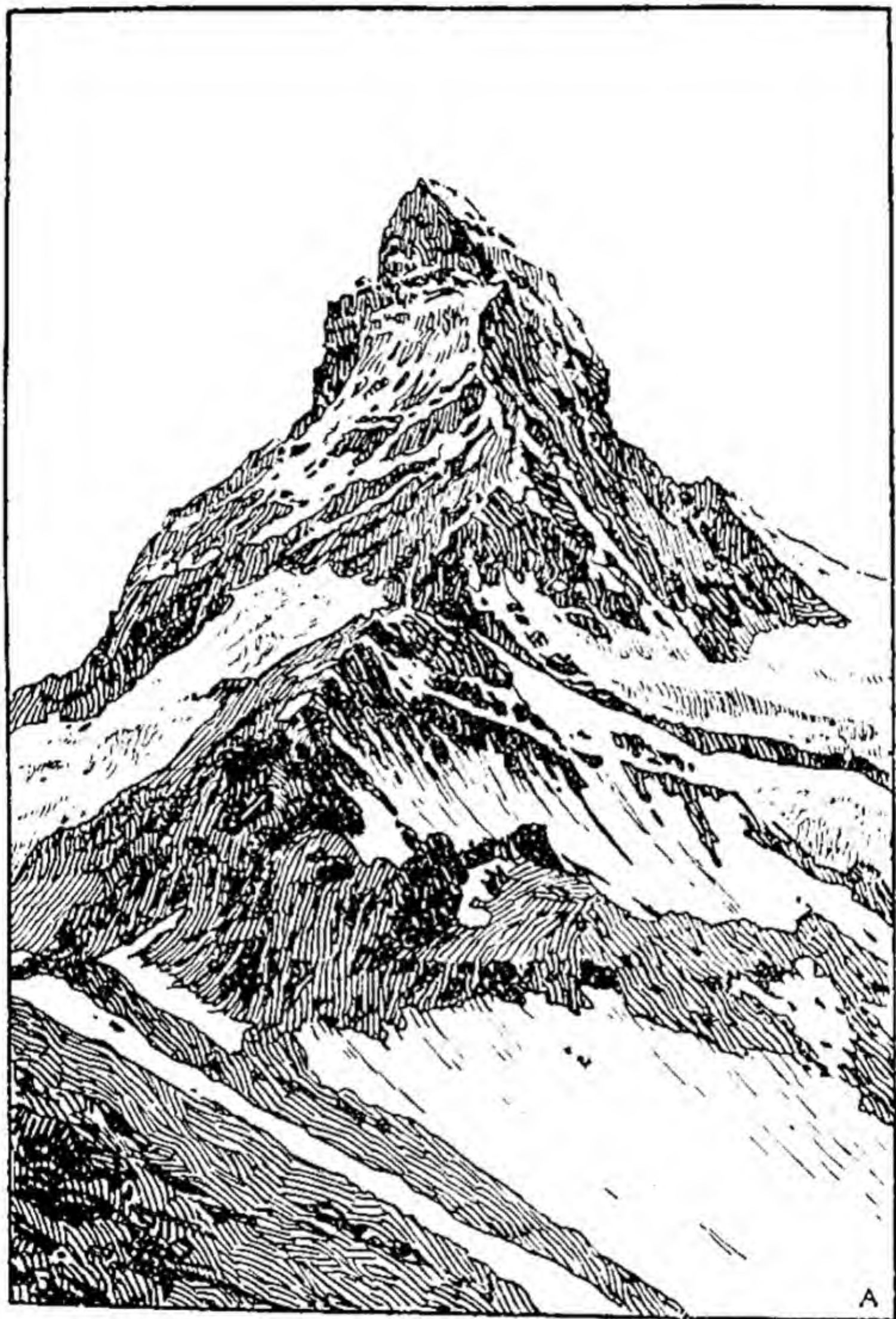
² I remember speaking about pedestrianism to a well-known mountaineer some years ago, and venturing to remark that a man who averaged thirty miles a day might be considered a good walker. "A fair walker," he said. "A fair walker." "What then would you consider *good* walking?" "Well," he replied, "I will tell you. Some time back a friend and I agreed to go to Switzerland, but a short time afterwards he wrote to say he ought to let me know that a young and

steady motion, one tourist and one native walked together. The youngest Taugwalder fell to my share, and the lad marched well, proud to be on the expedition, and happy to show his powers. The winebags also fell to my lot to carry, and throughout the

delicate lad was going with him who would not be equal to great things, in fact he would not be able to do more than fifty miles a day!" "What became of the young and delicate lad?" "He lives." "And who was your extraordinary friend?" "Charles Hudson." I have every reason to believe that the gentlemen referred to *were* equal to walking more than fifty miles a day, but they were exceptional, not *good* pedestrians.

Charles Hudson, Vicar of Skillington in Lincolnshire, was considered by the mountaineering fraternity to be the best amateur of his time. He was the organiser and leader of the party of Englishmen who ascended Mont Blanc by the Aig. du Gôûter, and descended by the Grands Mulets route, without guides, in 1855. His long practice made him surefooted, and in that respect he was not greatly inferior to a born mountaineer. I remember him as a well-made man of middle height and age, neither stout nor thin—though grave, and with quiet unassuming manners. Although an athletic man, he would have been overlooked in a crowd; and although he had done the greatest mountaineering feats which have been done, he was the last man to speak of his own doings. His friend Mr. Hadow was a young man of nineteen, who had the looks and manners of a greater age. He was a rapid walker, but 1865 was his first season in the Alps. Lord Francis Douglas was about the same age as Mr. Hadow. He had had the advantage of several seasons in the Alps. He was nimble as a deer, and was becoming an expert mountaineer. Just before our meeting he had ascended the Ober Gabelhorn (with old Peter and Jos. Viennin), and this gave me a high opinion of his powers; for I had examined that mountain all round, a few weeks before, and had declined its ascent on account of its apparent difficulty.

My personal acquaintance with Mr. Hudson was very slight—still I should have been content to have placed myself under his orders if he had chosen to claim the position to



THE MATTERHORN FROM THE NORTH-EAST

Whymper's route was (roughly) up the centre of the picture.
The Italian ridge is on the opposite side of the mountain.

day, after each drink, I replenished them secretly with water, so that at the next halt they were found fuller than before! This was considered a good omen, and little short of miraculous.

On the first day we did not intend to ascend to any great height, and we mounted, accordingly, very leisurely; picked up the things which were left in the chapel at the Schwarzsee at 8.20, and proceeded thence along the ridge connecting the Hörnli with the Matterhorn.¹ At 11.30 we arrived at the base of the actual peak; then quitted the ridge, and clambered round some ledges, on to the eastern face. We were now fairly upon the mountain, and were astonished to find that places which from the Riffel, or even from the Furggengletscher, looked entirely impracticable, were so easy that we could *run about*.

Before 12 o'clock we had found a good position for which he was entitled. Those who knew him will not be surprised to learn that, so far from doing this, he lost no opportunity of consulting the wishes and opinions of those around him. We deliberated together whenever there was occasion, and our authority was recognised by the others. Whatever responsibility there was devolved upon us. I recollect with satisfaction that there was no difference of opinion between us as to what should be done, and that the most perfect harmony existed between all of us so long as we were together.

¹ Arrived at the chapel 7.30 a.m.; left it, 8.20; halted to examine route, 9.30; started again, 10.25, and arrived at 11.20 at the cairn made by Mr. Kennedy in 1862, marked 10,820 feet upon the map. Stopped ten minutes here. From the Hörnli to this point we kept, when possible, to the crest of the ridge. The greater part of the way was excessively easy, but there were a few places where the axe had to be used.

the tent, at a height of eleven thousand feet.¹ Croz and young Peter went on to see what was above, in order to save time on the following morning. They cut across the heads of the snow-slopes which descended towards Furggengletscher, and disappeared round a corner; but shortly afterwards we saw them high up on the face, moving quickly. We others made a solid platform for the tent in a well-protected spot, and then watched eagerly for the return of the men. The stones which they upset told that they were very high, and we supposed that the way must be easy. At length, just before 3 p.m., we saw them coming down, evidently much excited. "What are they saying, Peter?" "Gentlemen, they say it is no good." But when they came near we heard a different story. "Nothing but what was good; not a difficulty, not a single difficulty! We could have gone to the summit and returned to-day easily!"

We passed the remaining hours of daylight—some basking in the sunshine, some sketching or collecting; and when the sun went down, giving, as it departed, a glorious promise for the morrow, we returned to the tent to arrange for the night. Hudson made tea, I coffee, and we then retired each one to his blanket-bag; the Taugwalders, Lord Francis Douglas and myself occupying the tent, the others remaining, by preference, outside. Long after dusk the cliffs above

¹ Thus far the guides did not once go to the front. Hudson or I led, and when any cutting was required we did it ourselves. This was done to spare the guides, and to show them that we were thoroughly in earnest. The spot at which we camped was just four hours' walking from Zermatt.

echoed with our laughter and with the songs of the guides, for we were happy that night in camp, and feared no evil.

We assembled together outside the tent before dawn on the morning of the 14th, and started directly it was light enough to move. Young Peter came on with us as a guide, and his brother returned to Zermatt. We followed the route which had been taken on the previous day, and in a few minutes turned the rib which had intercepted the view of the eastern face from our tent platform. The whole of this great slope was now revealed, rising for three thousand feet like a high natural staircase. Some parts were more, and others were less easy; but we were not once brought to a halt by any serious impediment, for when an obstruction was met in front it could always be turned to the right or to the left. For the greater part of the way there was, indeed, no occasion for the rope, and sometimes Hudson led, sometimes myself. At 6.20 we had attained a height of 12,800 feet, and halted for half an hour; we then continued the ascent without a break until 9.55, when we stopped for fifty minutes, at a height of 14,000 feet. Twice we struck the north-east ridge, and followed it for some little distance—to no advantage, for it was usually more rotten and steep, and always more difficult than the face. Still, we kept near to it, lest stones perchance might fall.¹

¹ Very few stones fell during the two days I was on the mountain, and none came near us. Others who have followed the same route have not been so fortunate; they may not,

We had now arrived at the foot of that part which, from the Riffelberg or from Zermatt, seems perpendicular or overhanging, and could no longer continue on the eastern side. For a little distance we ascended by snow upon the *arête*—that is, the ridge—descending towards Zermatt, and then, by common consent, turned over to the right, or to the northern side. Before doing so, we made a change in the order of ascent. Croz went first, I followed, Hudson came third; Hadow and old Peter were last. "Now," said Croz, as he led off, "now for something altogether different." The work became difficult, and required caution. In some places there was little to hold, and it was desirable that those should be in front who were least likely to slip. The general slope of the mountain at this part was *less* than 40 degrees, and snow had accumulated in, and had filled up, the interstices of the rock face, leaving only occasional fragments projecting here and there. These were at times

perhaps, have taken the same precautions. It is a noteworthy fact that the lateral moraine of the left bank of the Furggen-gletscher is scarcely larger than that of the right bank, although the former receives all the *débris* that falls from the four thousand feet of cliffs which form the eastern side of the Matterhorn, whilst the latter is fed by perfectly insignificant slopes. Neither of these moraines is large. This is strong evidence that stones do *not* fall to any great extent from the eastern face. The inward dip of the beds retains the detritus in place. Hence the eastern face appears, when one is upon it, to be undergoing more rapid disintegration than the other sides: in reality, the mantle of ruin spares the mountain from further waste. Upon the southern side rocks fall as they are rent off; "each day's work is cleared away" every day; and hence the faces and ridges are left naked, and exposed to fresh attacks.

covered with a thin film of ice, produced from the melting and re-freezing of the snow. It was the counterpart, on a small scale, of the upper seven hundred feet of the Pointe des Écrins—only there was this material difference: the face of the Écrins was about, or exceeded, an angle of 50 degrees, and the Matterhorn face was less than 40 degrees.¹ It was a place over which any fair mountaineer might pass in safety, and Mr. Hudson ascended this part, and, as far as I know, the entire mountain, without having the slightest assistance rendered to him upon any occasion. Sometimes, after I had taken a hand from Croz, or received a pull, I turned to offer the same to Hudson; but he invariably declined, saying it was not necessary. Mr. Hadow, however, was not accustomed to this kind of work, and required continual assistance. It is only fair to say that the difficulty which he found at this part arose simply and entirely from want of experience.

This solitary difficult part was of no great extent.² We bore away over it at first, nearly horizontally, for a distance of about four hundred feet; then ascended directly towards the summit for about sixty feet; and then doubled back to the ridge which descends towards Zermatt. A long stride round a rather awkward corner brought us to snow once more. The last doubt vanished! The Matter-

¹ This part was less steeply inclined than the whole of the eastern face.

² I have no memorandum of the time it occupied. It must have taken about an hour and a half.

horn was ours! Nothing but two hundred feet of easy snow remained to be surmounted!

You must now carry your thoughts back to the seven Italians who started from Breil on 11 July. Four days had passed since their departure, and we were tormented with anxiety lest they should arrive on the top before us. All the way up we had talked of them, and many false alarms of "men on the summit" had been raised. The higher we rose, the more intense became the excitement. What if we should be beaten at the last moment? The slope eased off, at length we could be detached, and Croz and I, dashing away, ran a neck-and-neck race, which ended in a dead heat. At 1.40 p.m. the world was at our feet, and the Matterhorn was conquered. Hurrah! Not a footstep could be seen.

It was not yet certain that we had not been beaten. The summit of the Matterhorn was formed of a rudely level ridge, about three hundred and fifty feet long,¹ and the Italians might have been at its farther extremity. I hastened to the southern end, scanning the snow right and left eagerly. Hurrah! again; it was untrodden. "Where were the men?" I peered over the cliff, half doubting,

¹ The highest points are towards the two ends. In 1865 the northern end was slightly higher than the southern one. In bygone years Carrel and I often suggested to each other that we might one day arrive upon the top, and find ourselves cut off from the very highest point by a notch in the summit-ridge which is seen from the Theodule and from Breil. This notch is very conspicuous from below, but when one is actually upon the summit it is hardly noticed, and it can be passed without the least difficulty.

half expectant. I saw them immediately—mere dots on the ridge, at an immense distance below. Up went my arms and my hat. “Crozz! Crozz!! Come here!” “Where are they, Monsieur?” “There, don’t you see them, down there?” “Ah! the *coquins*, they are low down.” “Crozz, we must make those fellows hear us.” We yelled until we were hoarse. The Italians seemed to regard us—we could not be certain. “Crozz, we *must* make them hear us; they *shall* hear us!” I seized a block of rock and hurled it down, and called upon my companion, in the name of friendship, to do the same. We drove our sticks in, and prised away the crags, and soon a torrent of stones poured down the cliffs. There was no mistake about it this time. The Italians turned and fled.¹

Still, I would that the leader of that party² could have stood with us at that moment, for our victorious shouts conveyed to him the disappointment of the ambition of a lifetime. He was *the* man, of all those who attempted the ascent of the Matterhorn, who most deserved to be the first upon its summit. He was the first to doubt its inaccessibility, and he was the only man who persisted in believing that its ascent would be accomplished. It was the aim of his life to make the ascent from the side of Italy, for the honour of his native valley. For a time he had

¹ I have learnt since from J. A. Carrel that they heard our first cries. They were then upon the south-west ridge, close to the “Cravate,” and *twelve hundred and fifty* feet below us; or, as the crow flies, at a distance of about one-third of a mile.

² Jean Antoine Carrel.

the game in his hands: he played it as he thought best; but he made a false move, and he lost it. Times have changed with Carrel. His supremacy is questioned in the Val Tournanche; new men have arisen; and he is no longer recognised as *the* chasseur above all others: but so long as he remains the man that he is to-day, it will not be easy to find his superior.

The others had arrived, so we went back to the northern end of the ridge. Croz now took the tent-pole,¹ and planted it in the highest snow. "Yes," we said, "there is the flagstaff, but where is the flag?" "Here it is," he answered, pulling off his blouse and fixing it to the stick. It made a poor flag, and there was no wind to float it out, yet it was seen all around. They saw it at Zermatt—at the Riffel—in the Val Tournanche. At Breil, the watchers cried, "Victory is ours!" They raised "bravos" for Carrel, and "vivas" for Italy, and hastened to put themselves *en fête*. On the morrow they were undeceived. "All was changed; the explorers returned sad—cast down—disheartened—gloomy." "It is true," said the men. "We saw them ourselves—they hurled stones at us! The old traditions *are* true—there are spirits on the top of the Matterhorn!"²

¹ At our departure the men were confident that the ascent would be made, and took one of the poles out of the tent. I protested that it was tempting Providence; they took the pole, nevertheless.

² Signor Giordano was naturally disappointed at the result, and wished the men to start again. *They all refused to do so, with the exception of Jean-Antoine.* Upon 16 July he set out again with three others, and upon the 17th gained

We returned to the southern end of the ridge to build a cairn and then paid homage to the view.¹ The

the summit by passing (at first) up the south-west ridge, and (afterwards) by turning over to the Z'Mutt, or north-western side. On the 18th he returned to Breil.

Whilst we were upon the southern end of the summit-ridge, we paid some attention to the portion of the mountain which intervened between ourselves and the Italian guides. It seemed as if there would not be the least chance for them if they should attempt to storm the final peak directly from the end of the "shoulder." In that direction cliffs fell sheer down from the summit, and we were unable to see beyond a certain distance. There remained the route about which Carrel and I had often talked, namely to ascend directly at first from the end of the "shoulder," and afterwards to swerve to the left—that is, to the Z'Mutt side—and to complete the ascent from the north-west. When we were upon the summit we laughed at this idea. The part of the mountain that I have described upon p. 125, was not easy, although its inclination was moderate. If that slope were made only 10 degrees steeper, its difficulty would be enormously increased. To double its inclination would be to make it impracticable. The slope at the southern end of the summit-ridge, falling towards the north-west, was *much* steeper than that over which we passed, and we ridiculed the idea that any person should attempt to ascend in that direction, when the northern route was so easy. Nevertheless, the summit was reached by that route by the undaunted Carrel. From knowing the final slope over which he passed, and from the account of Mr. F. C. Grove—who is the only traveller by whom it has been traversed—I do not hesitate to term the ascent of Carrel and Bich in 1865 the most desperate piece of mountain-scrambling upon record. In 1869 I asked Carrel if he had ever done anything more difficult. His reply was, "Man cannot do anything much more difficult than that!"

¹ The summit-ridge was much shattered, although not so extensively as the south-west and north-east ridges. The highest rock, in 1865, was a block of mica-schist, and the fragment I broke off it not only possesses, in a remarkable degree, the *character* of the peak, but mimics, in an astonishing manner, the details of its form.

day was one of those superlatively calm and clear ones which usually precede bad weather. The atmosphere was perfectly still, and free from all clouds or vapours. Mountains fifty—nay, a hundred—miles off, looked sharp and near. All their details—ridge and crag, snow and glacier—stood out with faultless definition.

Pleasant thoughts of happy days in bygone years came up unbidden, as we recognised the old, familiar forms. All were revealed—not one of the principal peaks of the Alps was hidden.¹ I see them clearly now—the great inner circles of giants, backed by the ranges, chains and *massifs*. First came the Dent Blanche, hoary and grand; the Gabelhorn and pointed Rothhorn; and then the peerless Weisshorn: the towering Mischabelhörner, flanked by the Allaleinhorn, Strahlhorn and Rimpfischhorn; then Monte Rosa—with its many Spitzes—the Lyskamm and the Breithorn. Behind were the Bernese Oberland, governed by the Finsteraarhorn; the Simplon and St. Gothard groups; the Disgrazia and the Orteler. Towards the south we looked down to Chivasso on the plain of Piedmont, and far beyond. The Viso—one hundred miles away—seemed close upon us; the Maritime Alps—one hundred and thirty miles distant—were free from haze. Then came my first love—the Pelvoux; the Écrins and the Meije; the clusters of the Graians; and lastly, in the west, gorgeous in the full sunlight, rose the monarch of all—Mont

¹ It is most unusual to see the southern half of the panorama unclouded. A hundred ascents may be made before this will be the case again.

Blanc. Ten thousand feet beneath us were the green fields of Zermatt, dotted with chalets, from which blue smoke rose lazily. Eight thousand feet below, on the other side, were the pastures of Breil. There were forests black and gloomy, and meadows bright and lively; bounding waterfalls and tranquil lakes; fertile lands and savage wastes; sunny plains and frigid plateaux. There were the most rugged forms, and the most graceful outlines—bold, perpendicular cliffs, and gentle, undulating slopes; rocky mountains and snowy mountains, sombre and solemn, or glittering and white, with walls—turrets—pinnacles—pyramids—domes—cones—and spires! There was every combination that the world can give, and every contrast that the heart could desire.

We remained on the summit for one hour—

One crowded hour of glorious life.

It passed away too quickly, and we began to prepare for the descent.

DESCENT OF THE MATTERHORN ¹

Hudson and I again consulted as to the best and safest arrangement of the party. We agreed that it would be best for Croz to go first,² and Hadow

¹ The substance of this chapter appeared in a letter in *The Times*, 8 August, 1865. A few paragraphs have now been added, and a few corrections have been made. The former will help to make clear that which was obscure in the original account, and the latter are, mostly, unimportant.

² If the members of the party had been more equally efficient, Croz would have been placed *last*.

second; Hudson, who was almost equal to a guide in sureness of foot, wished to be third; Lord F. Douglas was placed next, and old Peter, the strongest of the remainder, after him. I suggested to Hudson that we should attach a rope to the rocks on our arrival at the difficult bit, and hold it as we descended, as an additional protection. He approved the idea, but it was not definitely settled that it should be done. The party was being arranged in the above order whilst I was sketching the summit, and they had finished, and were waiting for me to be tied in line, when someone remembered that our names had not been left in a bottle. They requested me to write them down, and moved off while it was being done.

A few minutes afterwards I tied myself to young Peter, ran down after the others, and caught them just as they were commencing the descent of the difficult part. Great care was being taken. Only one man was moving at a time; when he was firmly planted the next advanced, and so on. They had not, however, attached the additional rope to rocks, and nothing was said about it. The suggestion was not made for my own sake, and I am not sure that it even occurred to me again. For some little distance we two followed the others, detached from them, and should have continued so had not Lord F. Douglas asked me, about 3 p.m., to tie on to old Peter, as he feared, he said, that Taugwalder would not be able to hold his ground if a slip occurred.

A few minutes later, a sharp-eyed lad ran into the

Monte Rosa hotel, to Seiler, saying that he had seen an avalanche fall from the summit of the Matterhorn on to the Matterhornngletscher. The boy was reproved for telling idle stories; he was right, nevertheless, and this was what he saw.

Michael Croz had laid aside his axe, and, in order to give Mr. Hadow greater security, was absolutely taking hold of his legs, and putting his feet, one by one, into their proper positions.¹ As far as I know, no one was actually descending. I cannot speak with certainty, because the two leading men were partially hidden from my sight by an intervening mass of rock, but it is my belief, from the movements of their shoulders, that Croz, having done as I have said, was in the act of turning round to go down a step or two himself; at this moment Mr. Hadow slipped, fell against him, and knocked him over. I heard one startled exclamation from Croz, then saw him and Mr. Hadow flying downwards; in another moment Hudson was dragged from his steps, and Lord F. Douglas immediately after him.² All this

¹ Not at all an unusual proceeding, even between born mountaineers. I wish to convey the impression that Croz was using all pains, rather than to indicate extreme inability on the part of Mr. Hadow. The insertion of the word "absolutely" makes the passage, perhaps, rather ambiguous. I retain it now, in order to offer the above explanation.

² At the moment of the accident, Croz, Hadow and Hudson were all close together. Between Hudson and Lord F. Douglas the rope was all but taut, and the same between all the others who were *above*. Croz was standing by the side of a rock which afforded good hold, and if he had been aware, or had suspected, that anything was about to occur, he might

was the work of a moment. Immediately we heard Croz's exclamation, old Peter and I planted ourselves as firmly as the rocks would permit¹; the rope was taut between us, and the jerk came on us both as one man. We held; but the rope broke midway between Taugwalder and Lord Francis Douglas. For a few seconds we saw our unfortunate companions sliding downwards on their backs, and spreading out their hands, endeavouring to save themselves. They passed from our sight uninjured, disappeared one by one, and fell from precipice to precipice on to the Matter- and would have gripped it, and would have prevented any mischief. He was taken totally by surprise. Mr. Hadow slipped off his feet on to his back, his feet struck Croz in the small of the back, and knocked him right over, head first. Croz's axe was out of his reach, and without it he managed to get his head uppermost before he disappeared from our sight. If it had been in his hand I have no doubt that he would have stopped himself and Mr. Hadow.

Mr. Hadow, at the moment of the slip, was not occupying a bad position. He could have moved either up or down, and could touch with his hand the rock of which I have spoken. Hudson was not so well placed, but he had liberty of motion. The rope was not taut from him to Hadow, and the two men fell ten or twelve feet before the jerk came upon him. Lord F. Douglas was not favourably placed, and could neither move up nor down. Old Peter was firmly planted, and stood just beneath a large rock which he hugged with both arms. I enter into these details to make it more apparent that the position occupied by the party at the moment of the accident was not by any means excessively trying. We were compelled to pass over the exact spot where the slip occurred, and we found—even with shaken nerves—that it was not a difficult place to pass. I have described the *slope generally* as difficult, and it is so undoubtedly to most persons; but it must be distinctly understood that Mr. Hadow slipped at an easy part.

¹ Or, more correctly, we held on as tightly as possible. There was no time to change our position.

horngletscher below, a distance of nearly four thousand feet in height. From the moment the rope broke it was impossible to help them.

So perished our comrades! For a space of half an hour we remained on the spot without moving a single step. The two men, paralysed by terror, cried like infants, and trembled in such a manner as to threaten us with the fate of the others. Old Peter rent the air with exclamations of "Chamounix! Oh, what will Chamounix say?" He meant, Who would believe that Croz could fall? The young man did nothing but scream or sob, "We are lost! We are lost!" Fixed between the two, I could neither move up nor down. I begged young Peter, to descend but he dared not. Unless he did, we could not advance. Old Peter became alive to the danger, and swelled the cry, "We are lost! We are lost!" The father's fear was natural—he trembled for his son; the young man's fear was cowardly—he thought of self alone. At last old Peter summoned up courage, and changed his position to a rock to which he could fix the rope; the young man then descended, and we all stood together. Immediately we did so, I asked for the rope which had given way, and found, to my surprise—indeed, to my horror—that it was the weakest of the three ropes. It was not brought, and should not have been employed, for the purpose for which it was used. It was old rope and, compared with the others, was feeble. It was intended as a reserve, in case we had to leave much rope behind, attached to rocks. I saw at once that a serious question was

involved, and made him give me the end. It had broken in mid-air, and did not appear to have sustained previous injury.

For more than two hours afterwards I thought almost every moment that the next would be my last; for the Taugwalders, utterly unnerved, were not only incapable of giving assistance, but were in such a state that a slip might have been expected from them at any moment. After a time, we were able to do that which should have been done at first, and fixed rope to firm rocks, in addition to being tied together. These ropes were cut from time to time, and were left behind.¹ Even with their assurance the men were afraid to proceed, and several times old Peter turned with ashy face and faltering limbs, and said, with terrible emphasis, "I CANNOT."

About 6 p.m. we arrived at the snow upon the ridge descending towards Zermatt, and all peril was over. We frequently looked, but in vain, for traces of our unfortunate companions; we bent over the ridge and cried to them, but no sound returned. Convinced at last that they were neither within sight nor hearing, we ceased from our useless efforts; and, too cast down for speech, silently gathered up our things, and the little effects of those who were lost, preparatory to continuing the descent. When, lo! a mighty arch appeared, rising above the Lyskamm, high into the sky. Pale, colourless and noiseless, but perfectly sharp and defined, except where it was lost

¹ These ends, I believe, are still attached to the rocks, and mark our line of ascent and descent.

in the clouds, this unearthly apparition seemed like a vision from another world; and almost appalled, we watched with amazement the gradual development of two vast crosses, one on either side. If the Taugwalders had not been the first to perceive it, I should have doubted my senses. They thought it had some connection with the accident, and I, after a while, that it might bear some relation to ourselves. But our movements had no effect upon it. The spectral forms remained motionless. It was a fearful and wonderful sight; unique in my experience, and impressive beyond description, coming at such a moment.¹

¹ I paid very little attention to this remarkable phenomenon, and was glad when it disappeared, as it distracted our attention. Under ordinary circumstances I should have felt vexed afterwards at not having observed with greater precision an occurrence so rare and so wonderful. I can add very little about it to that which is said above. The sun was directly at our backs; that is to say, the fog-bow was opposite to the sun. The time was 6.30 p.m. The forms were at once tender and sharp; neutral in tone; were developed gradually, and disappeared suddenly. The mists were light (that is, not dense), and were dissipated in the course of the evening.

In Parry's *Narrative of an Attempt to reach the North Pole* (4to, 1828), there is, at pages 99-100, an account of the occurrence of a phenomenon analogous to the above-mentioned one. "At half-past five p.m. we witnessed a very beautiful natural phenomenon. A broad white fog-bow first appeared opposite to the sun, as was very commonly the case," etc. I follow Parry in using the term fog-bow.

It may be observed that, upon the descent of the Italian guides upon 17 July, 1865, the phenomenon commonly termed the Brocken was observed. The following is the account given by the Abbé Amé Gorret in the *Feuille d'Aoste*, 31 October, 1865: "Nous étions sur l'épaule (the "shoulder")

I was ready to leave, and waiting for the others. They had recovered their appetites and the use of their tongues. They spoke in patois, which I did not understand. At length the son said in French, "Monsieur." "Yes." "We are poor men; we have lost our Herr; we shall not get paid; we can ill afford this."¹

"Stop!" I said, interrupting him. "That is nonsense; I shall pay you, of course, just as if your Herr were here." They talked together in their patois for a short time, and then the son spoke again. "We don't wish you to pay us. We wish you to write in the hotel-book at Zermatt, and to your journals, that we have not been paid." "What nonsense are you talking? I don't understand you. What do you mean?" He proceeded: "Why, next year there will be many travellers at Zermatt, and we shall get more *voyageurs*."

Who could answer such a proposition? I made them no reply in words,² but they knew very well the indignation that I felt. They filled the cup of bitterness to overflowing, and I tore down the cliff, madly and recklessly, in a way that caused them,

quand nous remarquâmes un phénomène qui nous fit plaisir; le nuage était très-dense du côté de Valtornanche, c'était serein en Suisse; nous nous vîmes au milieu de laquelle nous voyions notre ombre." This occurred at about 6.30 to 7 p.m., and the Italians in mention were at about the same height as ourselves—namely 14,000 feet.

¹ They had been travelling with and had been engaged by Lord F. Douglas, and so considered him their employer, and responsible to them.

² Nor did I speak to them afterwards, unless it was absolutely necessary, so long as we were together.

more than once, to inquire if I wished to kill them. Night fell; and for an hour the descent was continued in the darkness. At 9.30 a resting-place was found, and upon a wretched slab, barely large enough to hold the three, we passed six miserable hours. At daybreak the descent was resumed, and from the Hörnli ridge we ran down to the chalets of Buhl, and on to Zermatt. Seiler met me at his door, and followed in silence to my room. "What is the matter?" "The Taugwalders and I have returned." He did not need more, and burst into tears; but lost no time in useless lamentations, and set to work to rouse the village. Ere long a score of men had started to ascend the Hohlicht heights above Kalbermatt and Z'Mutt, which commanded the plateau of the Matterhorn-gletscher. They returned after six hours, and reported that they had seen the bodies lying motionless on the snow. This was on Saturday; and they proposed that we should leave on Sunday evening, so as to arrive upon the plateau at daybreak on Monday. Unwilling to lose the slightest chance, the Rev. J. M'Cormick and I resolved to start on Sunday morning. The Zermatt men, threatened with excommunication by their priests if they failed to attend the early mass, were unable to accompany us. To several of them, at least, this was a severe trial, and Peter Perrin declared with tears that nothing else would have prevented him from joining in the search for his old comrades. Englishmen came to our aid. The Rev. J. Robertson and Mr. J. Phillpotts offered themselves, and their guide Franz

Andermatten; another Englishman lent us Joseph Marie and Alexandre Lochmatter. Frédéric Payot, and Jean Tarraz, of Chamounix, also volunteered.

We started at 2 a.m. on Sunday 16th, and followed the route that we had taken on the previous Thursday as far as the Hörnli. From thence we went down to the right of the ridge, and mounted through the *séracs* of the Matterhorn gletscher. By 8.30 we had got to the plateau at the top of the glacier, and within sight of the corner in which we knew my companions must be. As we saw one weather-beaten man after another raise the telescope, turn deathly pale, and pass it on without a word to the next, we knew that all hope was gone. We approached. They had fallen below as they had fallen above—Croz a little in advance, Hadow near him, and Hudson some distance behind; but of Lord F. Douglas we could see nothing. We left them where they fell; buried in snow at the base of the grandest cliff of the most majestic mountain of the Alps.

All those who had fallen had been tied with the Manilla, or with the second and equally strong rope, and consequently there had been only one link—that between old Peter and Lord F. Douglas—where the weaker rope had been used. This had a very ugly look for Taugwalder, for it was not possible to suppose that the others would have sanctioned the employment of a rope so greatly inferior in strength when there were more than two hundred and fifty feet of the better qualities still remaining out of use. For the sake of the old guide (who bore a good reputation),

and upon all other accounts, it was desirable that this matter should be cleared up; and after my examination before the court of inquiry which was instituted by the Government was over, I handed in a number of questions which were framed so as to afford old Peter an opportunity of exculpating himself from the grave suspicions which at once fell upon him. The questions, I was told, were put and answered; but the answers, although promised, have never reached me.

Meanwhile, the Administration sent strict injunctions to recover the bodies, and upon 19 July, twenty-one men of Zermatt accomplished that sad and dangerous task. Of the body of Lord Francis Douglas they too saw nothing; it is probably still arrested on the rocks above.¹ The remains of Hudson and Hadow were interred upon the north side of the Zermatt church, in the presence of a reverent crowd of sympathising friends. The body of Michael Croz lies upon the other side, under a simpler tomb; whose inscription bears honourable testimony to his rectitude, to his courage, and to his devotion.

So the traditional inaccessibility of the Matterhorn was vanquished, and was replaced by legends of a more real character. Others will essay to scale its proud cliffs, but to none will it be the mountain that it was to its early explorers. Others may tread its summit-snows, but none will ever know the feelings of those who first gazed upon its marvellous panorama; and none, I trust, will ever be compelled to

¹ This, or a subsequent party, discovered a sleeve. No other traces have been found.

tell of joy turned into grief, and of laughter into mourning. It proved to be a stubborn foe; it resisted long, and gave many a hard blow; it was defeated at last with an ease that none could have anticipated, but, like a relentless enemy—conquered but not crushed—it took terrible vengeance. The time may come when the Matterhorn shall have passed away, and nothing save a heap of shapeless fragments will mark the spot where the great mountain stood; for, atom by atom, inch by inch, and yard by yard, it yields to forces which nothing can withstand.

The play is over and the curtain is about to fall. Before we part, a word upon the graver teachings of the mountains. See yonder height! 'Tis far away—unbidden comes the word "Impossible!" "Not so," says the mountaineer. "The way is long, I know; it's difficult—it may be dangerous. It's possible, I'm sure; I'll seek the way; take counsel of my brother mountaineers, and find how they have gained similar heights, and learned to avoid the dangers." He starts (all slumbering down below); the path is slippery—may be laborious, too. Caution and perseverance gain the day—the height is reached! and those beneath cry, "Incredible; 'tis superhuman!"

We who go mountain-scrambling have constantly set before us the superiority of fixed purpose or perseverance to brute force. We know that each height, each step, must be gained by patient, laborious toil, and that wishing cannot take the place of working; we know the benefits of mutual aid; that many a

difficulty must be encountered, and many an obstacle must be grappled with or turned, but we know that where there's a will there's a way: and we come back to our daily occupations better fitted to fight the battle of life, and to overcome the impediments which obstruct our paths, strengthened and cheered by the recollection of past labours, and by the memories of victories gained in other fields.

I have not made myself an advocate or an apologist for mountaineering, nor do I now intend to usurp the functions of a moralist; but my task would have been ill performed if it had been concluded without one reference to the more serious lessons of the mountaineer. We glory in the physical regeneration which is the product of our exertions; we exult over the grandeur of the scenes that are brought before our eyes, the splendours of sunrise and sunset, and the beauties of hill, dale, lake, wood and waterfall; but we value more highly the development of manliness, and the evolution, under combat with difficulties, of those noble qualities of human nature—courage, patience, endurance and fortitude.

Some hold these virtues in less estimation, and assign base and contemptible motives to those who indulge in our innocent sport.

“Be thou chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny.”

Others, again, who are not detractors, find mountaineering, as a sport, to be wholly unintelligible. It is not greatly to be wondered at—we are not all

constituted alike. Mountaineering is a pursuit essentially adapted to the young or vigorous, and not to the old or feeble. To the latter, toil may be no pleasure; and it is often said by such persons, "This man is making a toil of pleasure." Let the motto on the title-page¹ be an answer, if an answer be required. Toil he must who goes mountaineering; but out of the toil comes strength (not merely muscular energy—more than that), an awakening of all the faculties; and from the strength arises pleasure. Then, again, it is often asked, in tones which seem to imply that the answer must at least be doubtful, "But does it repay you?" Well, we cannot estimate our enjoyment as you measure your wine, or weigh your lead—it is real, nevertheless. If I could blot out every reminiscence, or erase every memory, still I should say that my scrambles amongst the Alps have repaid me, for they have given me two of the best things a man can possess—health and friends.

The recollections of past pleasures cannot be effaced. Even now as I write they crowd up before me. First comes an endless series of pictures, magnificent in form, effect and colour. I see the great peaks, with clouded tops, seeming to mount up for ever and ever; I hear the music of the distant herds, the peasant's yodel, and the solemn church bells; and I scent the fragrant breath of the pines: and after these have passed away, another train of thoughts succeeds—of those who have been upright, brave and true;

¹ Toil and pleasure, in their natures opposite, are yet linked together in a kind of necessary connection.—LIVY.

of kind hearts and bold deeds; and of courtesies received at stranger hands, trifles in themselves, but expressive of that good will towards men which is the essence of charity.

Still, the last, sad memory hovers round, and sometimes drifts across like floating mist, cutting off sunshine, and chilling the remembrance of happier times. There have been joys too great to be described in words, and there have been griefs upon which I have not dared to dwell; and with these in mind I say, Climb if you will, but remember that courage and strength are nought without prudence, and that a momentary negligence may destroy the happiness of a lifetime. Do nothing in haste; look well to each step; and from the beginning think what may be the end.

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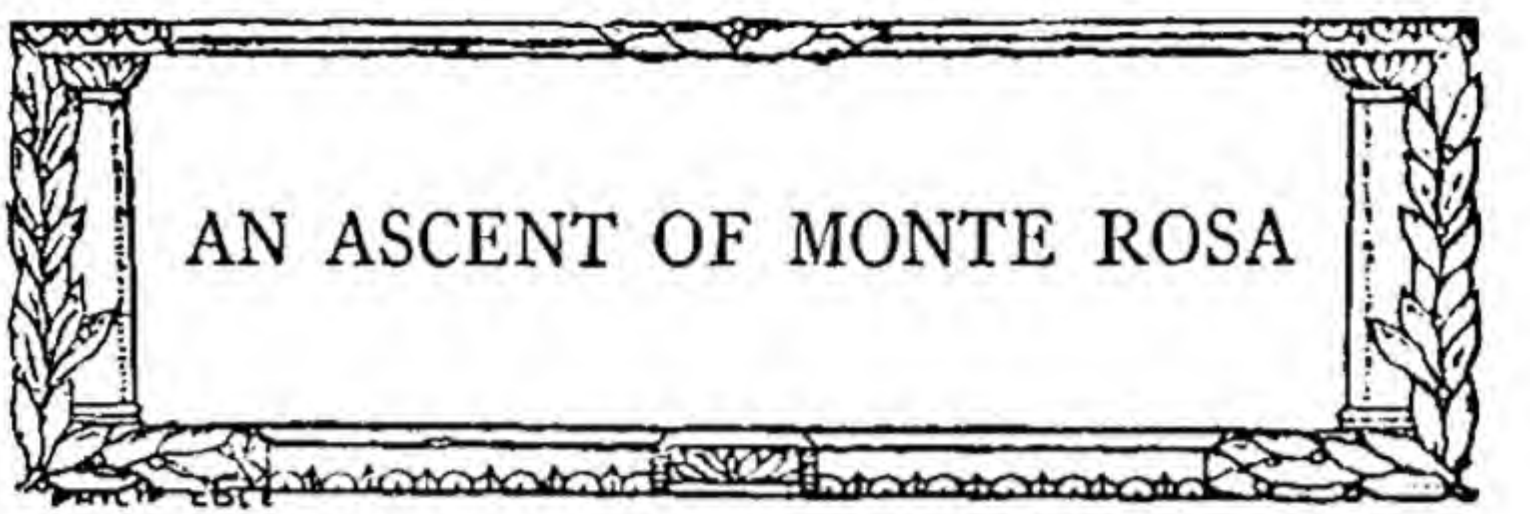
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MONTE ROSA (15,217 feet), fifty miles to the east from Mont Blanc along the great chain of the Pennine Alps, is the second highest mountain in Europe and the highest summit in Switzerland. Its ascent, like that of Mont Blanc, is formidable rather on account of the length of the expedition and severity of the conditions than for any intrinsic difficulties in the climbing. Monte Rosa was explored very early in the history of mountaineering, but its highest summit (the DUFOUR-SPITZE) was not conquered until 1855.

The ascent here described is one by Sir William Martin Conway which formed part of a complete traverse of the Alpine region carried out during the summer of 1894—from the Piedmontese plain to central Tyrol. The expedition lasted for nearly three months, and Sir Martin Conway's party included two sturdy Gurkha hill-men (men who had been tried out on Himalayan peaks and glaciers), his friend E. A. FitzGerald, and two well-known guides, J. B. Aymonod and Louis Carrel. Their adventures are described in Conway's fascinating book, *The Alps from End to End*.

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AN ASCENT OF MONTE ROSA

BY SIR WILLIAM MARTIN CONWAY

(From *The Alps from End to End.*)

How faintly flushed, how phantom fair
Was Monte Rosa, hanging there—
A thousand shadowy pencilled valleys
And snowy dells in a golden air.

TENNYSON.

OUR intention in coming to Zermatt was to traverse the Matterhorn, but a single glance at the mountain showed it to be for the time inaccessible. Not a guide would stir for it at any price. The south-west wind had for some days prevailed, and still kept sweeping against the solitary tower masses of cloud which cast hail and snow upon its upper rocks. No neighbouring mountain received such treatment. The Gabelhorn and Rothhorn remained almost clear of fresh snow, whilst the Matterhorn became hourly whiter. We reckoned, on our arrival, that one really fine day would bring the peak into climbable condition; next morning we agreed that two days would not be too much; before we left the place a week would scarcely have sufficed. The Fates were against us.

If the Matterhorn was closed Monte Rosa was not; so we started after lunch on the 11th and walked

slowly up to the Riffelalp and on to the old Riffelberg inn. A broad and well-engineered mule-road has supplanted the faint foot-track, where, in 1872, I lost my way in the dark and wandered for hours on the hillside. It would be hard to lose the way there now, even in the darkest night. The old Riffel inn is little changed. It was sparsely occupied by visitors of an active sort, bent on some expedition next day, weather permitting.

But would the weather permit? That was the question—the eternal weather-question of mountain regions. As night came on, the sky cleared and stars sparkled forth in apparent millions, too bright and twinkling to please an experienced eye. The southwest wind continued to blow with unabated vigour, bringing moisture from the plains and sea. We confined ourselves to hoping that we might be able to reach our summit next morning before the storm actually broke. A very early start was therefore essential.

Promptly at midnight I was summoned from a deep delicious slumber. In half an hour a hasty breakfast was dispatched and we were on our way, lighted by two flickering lanterns. There was no change in the weather, save that a broad bed of cloud lay across the south, and was piled high over the Theodul Pass. We marched steadily up the good path leading to the gap between the Riffelhorn and Gorner Grat. Beyond the gap it traverses the broad hillside and descends slowly to the Gorner glacier.

It has of late been much improved, so that mules can follow it to the edge of the ice, a state of things very different from the old.

We noticed with surprise the number of mule footprints in the way. They were accounted for when we learnt that a climbers' hut was in process of construction on the Plattje of Monte Rosa, and that mules were actively engaged in carrying the materials for it, not only to, but actually across the glacier. In little more than an hour we trod the ice. For the first time I was upon a large European glacier since returning from the Himalayas; I was astonished to find how relatively small were all the details about me. The glacier itself did not look small, but the streams upon its surface, the mounds of its unevenness, the stones, the medial moraines, the *moulins*, were all unexpectedly tiny. The *séracs* only, in the Alps, attain the same proportions as in the Karakorams. At one place we came to a surface-stream which had undercut its bank, as do the surface-streams on the Hispar glacier, but the height of the overhang thus formed was not more than ten feet, and the impediment caused no delay. Night still reigned in its blackest hour. Nowhere was there visible promise of dawn. Over the Weissthor the Pleiades were rising on the edge of the ice. The great mountains stood up dimly around, felt rather than seen. Our tread crunched the crisp honeycombed surface of the glacier; streamlets jangled past beneath us, or leapt into mills; the wind visited us in noisy puffs. Now and again a step had to be cut, and once the strained

glacier burst across with a ringing sound at the point, where Carrel's¹ axe struck it, and a baby crevasse was formed.

We did not take the best way over the ice, and we remained on it too long, thus providing for ourselves difficulty in effecting an exit on to the moraine that borders the rocks called the Plattje at the foot of Monte Rosa. It is here that the new hut was building. The carefully made road to it, easily found by daylight, would have saved us trouble. Above the hut one mounts over rough crystalline rocks, rounded by the ancient glacier that covered them, and up a few snow-slopes to the highest rocks, called Auf'm Felsen, where we could extinguish the lanterns on halting for a brief meal.

Such halts for refreshment are among the best of mountain pleasures. They are generally made in the midst of fine scenery and at some period of the climb when a definite stage of the work has been accomplished, so that there is a sense of repose well earned. But this morning there was no pleasure in our halt. The wind was already howling about us. Shelter could not be found. The sky was overcast with leaden clouds which, hanging above or behind the mountains, seemed to depress them into little hills. Only in the blue, purple and grey chord of colour was there a strange dignity and beauty of a threatening sort. We could hardly eat for shivering. Each put on whatever extra wrap he had and prepared to face the elements. At a quarter-past four we

¹ See preliminary note, p. 148.—ED.

fastened ourselves to the rope and started again in grim humour.

The sun was just coming up and pouring a golden flood of light beneath the roof of clouds. It caught their rippled undersurface and revealed a series of tiny parallel wavelets, formed by the hurrying wind. Monsieur Vallot, in one of his papers, recording the results of observations made at his observatory on Mont Blanc, shows how, during the course of a gale, gusts of wind are accompanied by sudden diminution of atmospheric pressure, and their cessation by a recovery; whence he very justly concludes that such gusts are caused by the passing of little cyclones. It is probable that these cyclets are produced where the hurrying air comes in contact with mountains. In aerial regions remote from the earth's surface they are less likely to arise. The rippled structure of the undersurface of the clouds this day was proof that, in them at any rate, notwithstanding the fury of the gale, cyclets were not present. Great waves and umbrellas of cloud hung over most of the peaks. There was a pallor as of death upon the snow. Suddenly Karbir¹ called a halt, and handed me the photographic apparatus, for the tip of the Matterhorn looked as though it had just been withdrawn from some Titanic blast-furnace. Upon no other point did the rising sunlight fall. What a difference there is between these alert Gurkhas and the duller peasantry of the Alps, for whom, even when they have been developed into good guides, a camera is a "dumme

¹ One of the Gurkhas.—ED.

Geschichte."¹ "Dumm ist das Ding"² was, I am told, the comment of a famous Oberland guide, upon the photographic apparatus of one of the best mountain photographers for whom it chanced to be his duty one day to carry.

The snow was as hard as a wooden floor. We advanced rapidly over the region of hidden crevasses, just above the Felsen, without need for cautious inquiry as to the strength of their roofs. Beyond came the snow-slopes of the beautiful Monte Rosa glacier, where, when the snow is soft, fatigue awaits the aspiring traveller.

Every step of the way was familiar to me, for I have climbed Monte Rosa, in whole or in part, some eight times. On this occasion I was climbing it, partly for the reader's sake, partly for the Gurkhas. There was little enough pleasure in the job. The top of the mountain-mass, which goes collectively under the name of Monte Rosa, that is to say "Monte Roesse" or the "Glacier Mountain," is a long ridge with several peaks. The Nord End, as its name implies, is the most northerly and is on the frontier, then comes the highest point or Dufour Spitze.³ The Zumstein Spitze follows and then the Signal Kuppe, where the two great ridges intersect and form what ought to be the culminating point of the mountain. The Dufour Spitze is eighty-five feet higher than the Nord End. So slight a difference is not worth mentioning. As the Nord End is but rarely climbed and

¹ "Stupid affair."

² "The thing is stupid."

³ Named after the great Swiss Surveyor.—ED.

occupies to my thinking a finer situation than its neighbour, I determined to make it our goal. The route to it had this further advantage that it was protected from the raging gale.

Accordingly, after mounting snow-slopes for an hour or so, we bore away to the left, into the heart of the Monte Rosa *névé*, instead of turning up to the right and climbing to the saddle, whence a rock and snow *arête* leads to the highest peak. The two highest summits are connected by a beautiful white ridge, called the Silber Sattel, the upper edge of a great snowfield, one of the loftiest in the Alps, where storms rage with unusual frequency, and the annual snowfall is doubtless above the average. The Monte Rosa glacier drains this plateau. The descending *néve* breaks away in huge steps, each overhung by a wall of threatening ice. Avalanches break from these walls and their ruins encumber the slopes. The schrunds, ice-walls and *séracs* of the Monte Rosa *névé* are some of the finest in Europe.

Our original intention was to climb first to the Silber Sattel and then to the Nord End, but we could not see a way through the great crevasses, so we turned instead up the mountain's face and made for its north ridge, a route I took many years ago in company with that excellent guide Ferdinand Imseng, who met his death shortly afterwards on the Macugnaga side of the same mountain. In three hours and a half from our breakfast-place we reached the bergschrund at the foot of the face. It was not very quick going, but then we did not always choose the

best route amongst the crevasses, and once we made a long descent below some tottering *séracs*, which would have been dangerous in the afternoon.

For a time the gale kept off the clouds. They remained high above the great peaks, and patches of blue sky were amongst them. The effect was wild and fine. As we crossed the bergschrund our spirits rose. "In an hour," said Aymonod,¹ "we ought to be on the top." His axe went to work on the slope of hard snow, and step followed step in quick succession. At a pause, the word "ice" came down the line. There was no mistake about it. It was as hard and blue as any I ever saw. Our rate of progress became slow in proportion. Each step had now to be hewn as out of rock. The higher we mounted the stronger blew the wind. It bore a freezing cloud of fresh fallen snow, wherewith it filled the steps as we quitted them. The cold became intense; the fitful sunshine was scarcely felt. Fortunately I was wearing a new pair of Zermatt-made boots, and for the first time in my life knew what it was to be warmly shod. Three thicknesses of leather over the foot form a real protection. I kept asking the men about their state and all assured me they were right; but doubtless it was at this time the frost caught Amar Sing, though he did not discover that his toes were frost-bitten till the evening. Hour passed after hour, and we scarcely seemed to approach the gap for which we were making in the rock-ridge above. One guide relieved the other and then we sent Karbir ahead.

¹ See preliminary note, p. 148.—ED.

He worked admirably and brought us to the top of the slope. Beyond the gap we emerged on to a snowfield, where the new snow was piled in powdery drifts, up which we waded, after Amar Sing, to the sharp rock-top.

There was no talk of halting for the view; there was little view to halt for. The Macugnaga valley below was one great cauldron of whirling mists, clouds were sweeping down towards us in massed battalions, and wreaths of snow were whirling about in tiny cyclones all around. We just passed over the peak, noticed that the hour was noon, and at once began the descent along the other ridge towards the Silber Sattel, judging that the slopes in that direction were of snow. We did not relish the idea of going down our ice staircase of a thousand steps, when each step would first have to be cleared of drifted snow. Moreover, we had seen a way through the crevasses which we judged would prove both safe and rapid.

Before descending far, we found that, though the slope was of snow, the snow was too hard to be trodden, so step-cutting began again. For an hour we made tantalisingly slow progress. The maze of crevasses was at our feet and there was our way visible through it; but it was an intricate way and I questioned whether we should find it in fog, whilst there seemed every probability that mist soon would envelop us. The clouds, passing over the landscape from Italy, were now coming in thicker ranks and at a continually lowering elevation. The Matterhorn was half buried in them. They were on the point of

swallowing up all the higher levels. They poured over the Lyskamm, reached the crest of the Dufour peak, and began tearing down upon us. One moment the glacier below was like a map before us; the next it was utterly blotted out. We could barely see one another. The worst appeared to have come, yet Fortune was not utterly cruel. A slight change in the wind turned our glacier-valley into a draught-way for the gale, which rent the mists asunder and enabled us thenceforth to see far enough for our needs. We gained slopes where the axe was no longer required, and began threading our way amongst the large crevasses. Cold kept the snow-bridges firm. We crossed one after another in quick succession. But a new danger awaited us. The fresh snow was piled by the wind into heavy drifts on various slopes, too steep to retain it in stable equilibrium. Just as we were about to cross one of these, there was a dull crack, followed by a muffled roar; the soft blanket peeled away and shot down to a lower level. We had again to cross such a slope, bordered below by an enormous schrund; we cut it at the narrowest place, but paid for our passage by traversing immediately below *névé séracs*, some of which had recently fallen, whilst others, loaded with the fresh snow, seemed just about to fall. Here our only path was down an ice-gully, well used as an avalanche-trough, and so to a firm bridge over the lowest of the great crevasses. No time was lost in this part of the descent till we rejoined our old tracks. With swift feet and light hearts we hurried along them over endless easy snow-slopes to the Felsen

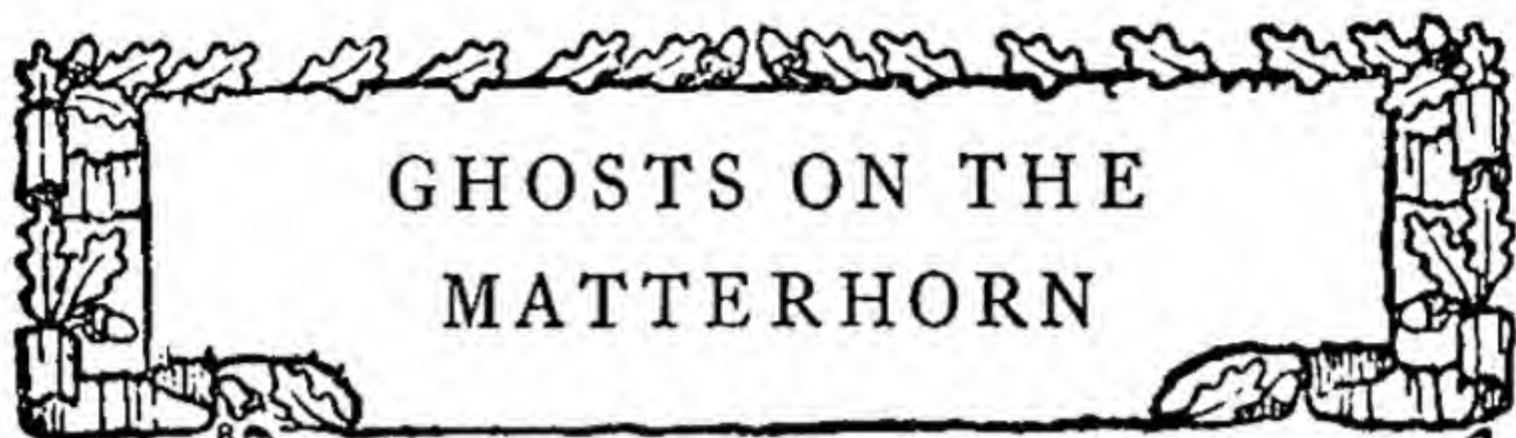
breakfast-place, where the rope could be laid aside. Seated in what now seemed good shelter, we took a hasty and uncomfortable meal after eight hours of enforced abstinence. Then, but not till then, I discovered that the bitter cold had wrought an internal mischief in me, the effect of which was to last several days.

The storm continued to rage, but intermittently, and on the whole at high elevations. It was the beginning of prolonged bad weather and it took the peaks first. Not till the third day did it penetrate to the valleys and envelop them in its full fury, to the delight of the peasantry, who had been praying for rain. We watched the black clouds sweep over from Italy and stalk northwards, a whole series of them, following the Zinal ridge, each with white or dark skirt according as it was strewing hail or rain. When these had passed to the Bernese Oberland, a new series came over and cast hail upon us, before taking the line of the Saas Grat and vanishing northward in their turn, one behind the other. There was no lightning, and as for rain and hail, little cared we about them. We descended as fast as my injured condition allowed, to the place where men were erecting the new hut, whence a series of stones and one or two red flags (*not* of Liberty), set up on the glacier, guided us along the track smoothed for the mules. Thus without further adventure we reached the old Riffelhaus, eighteen hours after setting out from it. I contented myself with descending for the night to the Riffelalp. The men went down to Zermatt. Thus

ended a day which was, if you please, fatiguing and sometimes painful, but which left behind it an extraordinary stimulus. Such struggles with nature produce a moral invigoration of enduring value. They wash the mind free of sentimental cobwebs and foolish imagining. They bring a man in contact with cold stony reality and call forth all that is best in his nature. They act as moral tonics. Of all the time I have spent in the mountains, such days as these have possessed upon the whole the most enduring value.

2 A. P. Mummery, from whose work, *My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus*, the following essay is taken, was a man of great intellectual powers, and a prodigious climber. By 1870 most of the big peaks in the Alps had succumbed to the invasion of English climbers, which began in earnest about 1850, and Mummery, climbing in the 'eighties, was the pioneer of a great number of difficult new routes on subsidiary peaks and by new faces—for example the sensational "Mummery Crack" in the ordinary route up the Grépon. He was most modest in the accounts of his climbs and writes with a charming sense of humour.

In 1894 he went to the Himalayas to climb Nanga Parbat. He and his two Ghurkas were last seen alive on 24 August.



GHOSTS ON THE MATTERHORN

BY A. F. MUMMERY

Sl. Gl. Ra 50

(From *My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus*.)

I WAS dreaming peacefully of my *bien aimée* the Aiguille des Charmoz—whom we had successfully wooed the previous day—when Burgener¹ broke in upon my slumbers and ejected me, ruthlessly, from the soft comfort of my bed.

Protests were vain. The huge ridge of the Furggen Matterhorn had long tempted his desires, and what are such things as sleep, rest, or blissful ease, when weighed in the balance with the wild joy of gripping grey-brown ledges, and hacking and beating the long gullies of black ice into submission? All the ingrained fighting instinct was aroused in him. He wished to hurl himself once more at the cliffs and ridges, matching his skill against their dumb, passionless resistance, and forcing them now, as ever, to yield to his reckless onslaught. Time, however, pressed, and if this attempt was to be made, without prejudicing other long-cherished hopes, it was necessary to reach Stalden that very night.

We hurried along to Argentière, and then the driver, thinking he had fairly got us in his power, coolly told us that it was quite impossible to catch

¹ The guide.—ED.

the mid-day train at Martigny; at all events, neither his horses nor anyone else's could do it. We were not, however, to be beaten. Seizing our axes and knapsacks, we left the voiture disconsolate on the road, and trudged manfully up the paths toward the Col de Balme. The driver, who saw the piled-up wealth of the Martigny tariff dwindling into a mere ten francs, protested with all the vigour of a Chamoniard.

We were buoyed up, during the ascent, by the hope that a voiture would be procurable at the Forclaz inn. But when we arrived there, we found that luck had abandoned us, and we must face the grim terrors of the road down to Martigny. Half choked by dust, and more than half baked by the blazing sun, we reached the railway station with just twenty minutes to spare. Burgener quickly recognised the necessities of the situation—borrowing a franc, he dashed into the town, and, before we could realise the nature of his quest, he returned with a great stoneware jar full of foaming beer. Jolly John Barleycorn quickly appeased our miseries, and by the time the lumbering train had arrived happiness was once more enshrined in the party.

We reached Stalden about 4 p.m., and halted for the night. By so doing, Burgener and Venetz were enabled to make those ecclesiastical arrangements which the peculiar enormities of the Furggen ridge seemed to render desirable. Such elaborate and careful preparations appeared to me a trifle uncanny, and subsequent events showed very clearly the evil effects which this sort of indulgence in religious

festivities has upon the nerves. However, both Burgener and Venetz appeared to be in excellent spirits when they returned, and we whiled away the summer evening with stories of chamois-hunting and the great deeds wrought amongst the winter snow.

The next day we strolled up to St. Niklaus, and drove merrily on to Zermatt, starting about 10.30 the same evening for our ridge. Near the last chalets, the guides, allured by the pleasing appearance of a small hollow, curled themselves up and went fast to sleep. I soon found that the grass was damp, not to say wet, and the wind bitterly cold. The contemplation of these discomforts gradually exhausted my patience, and, as there were no signs of waking, I gently stirred the sleepers with an ice-axe. The knapsacks were picked up, and we went slowly on our way. From this point our pace became steadily worse, until, at last, Burgener confessed to being very unwell. In consequence, I took his load, and we struggled onwards till we came to a great stone, close to the Schwarzer See. It was quite obvious by this time that the ascent must be abandoned, and, after an hour's halt, we tramped wearily back to Zermatt, where we arrived too early for breakfast and too late for bed.

After a bathe in the Triftbach, I returned to a sad and solitary meal in the Monte Rosa Hotel, and, from a secluded corner, heard my chances of success discussed on all sides; the more eager folk even neglecting their breakfasts in favour of the painful attitudes requisite to watch the Furggen ridge through the big telescope.

A well-known climber has expressed a doubt whether the Christian virtue of good temper is binding on a man before 9.30 a.m. I sincerely trust it may not be, or Venetz and I most certainly have a "*mauvais quart d'heure*" before us. Burgener, with much wisdom, went to bed, and was thus free from the wrangles with which Venetz and I sought to pass the dragging hours. As the day wore on, things began to take a more hopeful turn. Burgener was reported better, and, towards evening, even in favour of a renewed attempt. Two other parties were leaving for the Hörnli route at 11 p.m., so, to avoid the bustle and discomfort of an innumerable host, we determined not to start before midnight.

Owing to the usual delays, we did not actually get off till 12.45 p.m., and, once more, tramped up the slopes to our last night's halting-place. Whilst the men were consuming a sort of preparatory breakfast, I watched the curious movements of a light, far below on the Gorner glacier. The light, obviously, proceeded from a lantern, but its movements were most extraordinary and undecided. At one moment it would make good progress up the glacier, then it would halt, wobble up and down, in and out, dodge behind intervening rocks or ice, again reappear, and finally redescend to the original point of departure. These proceedings were then repeated, and there seemed to be no possible aim or object in its vagaries. However, my mind was chiefly occupied with the Furggen ridge, and, so soon as we again got under weigh, I thought no more of its strange behaviour.

The men were evidently determined to make up for our slow progress on the preceding night by the rapidity of their movements on this, and it was with no small delight that I hailed our arrival on the level stretch of boggy ground, under the Schwarzer See.

A few minutes later we were surrounded by the weird, unearthly flicker of innumerable will-o'-the-wisps. At every step they floated away on either hand, yet, seemingly, no sooner had we passed, than they crept up stealthily behind, dogging our footsteps with a cruel vindictiveness from which there appeared no hope of escape or flight.

The men were horror-struck. Burgener gripped my arm and hoarsely whispered: "Sehen Sie, Herr, die todten Leute!"¹

We were marked out for the vengeance of the immortal gods. The fiends who haunt the crags of the Matterhorn were already gloating over their prey! Such was the purport of the agonised whispers of the men. I am fain to confess, the crawling, bluish flames, the utter silence, and the contagion of my companions' superstitious fear, thrilled me with instinctive horror. I perceived, however, that if we were not to return to Zermatt baffled and beaten a second time, the delights of a spiritualistic séance must be abandoned in favour of a matter-of-fact explanation. My efforts in this direction led Burgener and Venetz to the somewhat erroneous belief that every square yard of England, Scotland and Wales is illuminated,

¹ "Look, Sir, the dead-folk!"—ED.

nightly, by similar, but far more brilliant and nerve-shattering displays. Despite the unfortunate way in which my German would give out just as I was making a really effective point, the men were evidently inclined to think that these "Geister"¹ were, perhaps, impostors; but, alas! this was not all.

"Ach lieber Herr, did you not see the wandering light on the Gorner glacier? There is no boggy ground there. That *was* a Geist."

In vain I protested that it was a lantern. "A lantern! What could anyone want there? It was on the road to nowhere; besides, it did not move forwards like a lantern, but kept wandering to and fro, twinkling and dodging, precisely as a disembodied spirit, with no particular business on hand, might be expected to do."

The position was serious enough in all conscience. It is a well-ascertained fact (attested by all the ecclesiastical authorities of the Saas, Zermatt and Anzasca valleys) that anyone seeing a "Geist" is certain to be killed within twenty-four hours! I pointed out to Burgener that this being so, there could be no advantage in turning back, for, either they were ghosts, in which case we must be killed, or they were not ghosts, in which case we might as well go on. The men admitted the dilemma, but suggested that even so, climbing up a peak for the purpose of being chucked off it by mischievous "Geister" is not pure and unalloyed joy. I readily assented to this proposition, but pointed out the in-

¹ "Ghosts."—ED.

convenience and discomfort, both mental and bodily, of being haled from the Monte Rosa Hotel, perhaps from the very *table d'hôte* itself, by the foul fiend and his myrmidons. I asked him to consider the scorn and contempt with which the Zermatt priesthood, ever jealous of their Saas Thal brethren, would witness his flight, as, clutched by the huge talons, the black wings bore him to the underworld. Burgener, who, like Luther and the early Christian fathers, had had personal acquaintance with his Satanic Majesty, agreed that this would be altogether too grievous, and, taking everything into consideration, that the balance of advantage lay with an advance. Being the most sceptical of the party, I was allotted the post of leader.

Suddenly, in the distance, appeared two lights. "The other parties!" I exclaimed, thinking the men's fears would be somewhat allayed by company. But Burgener and Venetz had "Geister" on the brain, and vowed that these also were undoubted specimens of that genus. I urged them to force the pace and find out. "What!" cried they, "do you know so little of Geister as to attempt such a thing as that?" Burgener, after much persuasion, consented to yodel, a proceeding attended with very grave danger—"Geister" don't like being yodelled at—and only to be effected in doubtful and tremulous sort. To our delight, however, back came a cheery yell, that the men recognised as belonging to Peter Taugwalder.

The sceptics in the party being much strengthened by this most opportune support, we pushed onwards

more cheerily. When, lo! a great luminous figure with outstretched arm sprang across our path, and, as instantly, melted into the blackness of night. I will freely admit that the inveterate sceptic was startled at this apparition, and stood motionless with horror and superstitious fear. The men, however, were actuated by other feelings. They knew that only a few yards off were the consecrated walls of the Schwarzer See chapel, and, dashing past me, they rushed, wild with panic fear, towards this tiny oasis of safety.

A second time the apparition stood before us, but now we could see that our mysterious foe was naught else than the door-post of the sacred edifice itself. A candle left in the chapel by Taugwalder throwing a fitful light on the timbered porch, as the unlatched door swung to and fro in the light breeze.

The men entered for devotional purposes, whilst I proceeded slowly on my way. Reaching the Furggen glacier, I sat down on a stone and waited. Half an hour passed, and I began to wonder whether a fresh troop of ghosts had driven them incontinently back to Zermatt. Happily, just as the first grey light of dawn began to show in the east, my shouts were answered, and, once more united, we tramped rapidly up the glacier. As the sun rose, its earliest beams fell on long wisps of snow torn from the crest of the Matterhorn, and though of fairy-like beauty, suggestive of more wind than we quite cared for.

We had by now reached the base of the steep glacier that clings to the eastern face of the Matter-

horn, and as our ghostly adventures had most unduly delayed us, we determined to try a short cut and ascend transversely over the distorted ice to a rock couloir that obviously gave access to the broken cliff immediately under the Furggen ridge. The adoption of this line of ascent illustrates very clearly the errors to which even the best ice men are occasionally subject. I have no hesitation in saying, that Burgener is second to no one living, in the skill with which he can steer his party through an ice fall, and the instinctive art of taking the best route. But on this occasion he was hopelessly astray. An easy route to the foot of our couloir can be found, either by keeping close under the north-eastern ridge till the upper level of the glacier is reached, and thence traversing across slightly inclined snow; or the climber may push over the flat glacier to the foot of the Furggen-grat, and find an equally easy way to the upper snows, close to its base.

We, however, took neither of these courses, and were soon involved in icework of the most sensational kind. At one point it appeared as if we should be forced to retreat. The upper lip of a huge crevasse towered forty feet or more above us, and it was only by the most brilliant skill that Burgener and Venetz succeeded in forcing their way up in a small transverse crevasse that, luckily, intersected it. Above this obstruction we halted a few minutes, to examine our line of attack.

From the Breuil Joch to the great snow-slopes of the eastern face, a steep cliff guards all approach to

the upper part of the mountain, and the rock couloir, referred to above, seemed to be the only point at which we could break through these defences. The main objections to it were the obvious frequency of stone avalanches, and the impossibility of conveniently gaining its base, save by the ascent of the deep groove cut by these same stones in the ice-slope below. However, we all agreed that well-behaved stones in the nineteenth century were scarcely likely to be on the move at 5 a.m., so we turned a couple of bergschrunds, scrambled into the avalanche groove, and dashed up at a furious pace; an occasional rattle overhead stimulating our movements to the utmost. The rock couloir proved to be ice-glazed, and not free from difficulty; moreover, we could only ascend exactly in the line of fire. It was, therefore, with feelings of great delight that we perceived a flaw in the cliff on our left, and were able to find a way through to the easy slopes of the face.

Here we halted to take breath, for our desperate exertions had been more than even the most active amongst us quite appreciated. A little stream, which the sun had just woke from its icy sleep, then suggested breakfast, and we unpacked the knapsacks and settled ourselves for half-an-hour's rest. Far below, a party bound for the Furggen Joch spied us on our lofty seats, and roused the echoes of the mountain with their yodels.

Bearing to our left we soon reached the ridge, and ascended without difficulty of any sort, till at 9 a.m. we reached the great tower, seen from Zermatt on

the left skyline just beneath the final peak. Standing in the gap between this tower and the mass of the mountain, we looked down a couloir of most appalling steepness. Far beneath us, amongst its lower crags and ridges, mists were curling and seething, seeming in their restless activity to be the half-awakened "Geister" hungering for their victims. So strange and mysterious did that deep chasm seem, that I half expected to see the writhing vapour take form and substance, and sweep to their doom those rash mortals who had surprised the dead amid their nightly revels.

Far above, the great ridges, armed with fantastic icicles, at one moment would stand out hard and sharp against a blue-black sky, and the next be lost in a blurred cloud of driving snow, the roar of each furious gust being followed by the ominous clatter of broken icicles, and the crash of great stones torn from the summit rocks.

The final peak looked very formidable, and, in such weather, could not have been assailed with any reasonable approach to safety. We resolved, in consequence, to traverse on to the ordinary Hörnli route. Scrambling up to a second tower, just above that already mentioned (also visible from Zermatt), we halted for a few minutes and made ready for a rapid traverse. So far, we had not been in the line of fire, but we were now compelled to break cover, and run the gauntlet of the hail of broken ice and stones that the gale was stripping from the topmost crags. The process of avoiding these missiles was rendered exceptionally difficult, by the way in which the furious

wind would deflect them from their course, and bring those which seemed to be falling well in front of the party right into its very midst. After more than one extremely narrow escape, we reached a point somewhat sheltered by a projecting crag above. Burgener turned straight up the slope towards it, and, at racing speed, led us to a secure ledge at its foot.

Immediately in front, the long, pitiless slabs, ceaselessly swept by whizzing, shrieking fragments of all sorts and sizes, suggested to Burgener—who has a most proper and prudent objection to every form of waste—that it would be well to drink our Bouvier and consume our other provisions, before any less fitting fate should overtake them. The knapsack was accordingly unpacked, and, in the grave and serious mood befitting the solemnity of the occasion, we proceeded to demolish those good things with which the thoughtful Seiler had stored our bags. Under these various benign influences our spirits rose rapidly, and Burgener's face resumed its wonted look of confidence; he once more shook his beard with defiance at the falling stones, and called "Der Teufel"¹ to witness that we had been in quite as bad places before. Looking back on that distant lunch, I have little doubt that Burgener fully realised that a rollicking, self-confident party can dodge falling stones and dance across steep slabs, in a manner, and at a pace, which is impossible to anxious and disheartened men. His object was fully attained; by the time we had tied on our hats with sundry handkerchiefs,

¹ "The Devil."—ED.

seen to the lacing of our boots, and otherwise pulled ourselves together, we felt quite satisfied that the stones and ice would exhibit their usual skill in missing the faithful climber.

We were soon springing across the slabs like a herd of frightened chamois. At one or two places, where the whole party was simultaneously on extremely insecure footing, we were forced to moderate the pace a little; but even then our leader would brook no hesitation, whether we liked it or whether we did not, his "*Schnell nur schnell*"¹ hurried us ever forwards. An occasional rap on the head by a splinter of ice, or the hurtle of a great stone, as it spun playfully between the various members of the party, most thoroughly accentuated Burgener's admonitions.

It is needless to say, a very few minutes of this sort of progress took us out of range, and we were able to rest in safety. A short distance farther was the well-known "shoulder." Scattered up and down it were the two parties ascending by the ordinary route. To reach them, however, was not easy. Bare rock, destitute of hold and extremely steep, intervened. Burgener made an effort to creep across, but one of the guides on the "shoulder" scrambled towards us, and after inspecting the cliff shouted that it was "*ganz unmöglich*."² Our leader retreated on hearing this, and we tried to traverse on a line some thirty feet below. This proved wholly impracticable, and the guides on the ridge kindly recommended us to go back by the way we had come. The advice was

¹ "Faster, faster."

² "Quite impossible."—ED.

doubtless well meant, but it raised our ire, and we turned once again to Burgener's original line of effort. After considerable difficulty we succeeded in working our way across and refuting our timorous advisers. We reached the "shoulder" just at the point where the ridge abuts against the final summit.

The other parties, having seen our success was assured, were already ascending, so we tucked ourselves under a great rock, and expressed heartfelt regrets for the Bouvier that was no more, and the good things that we had devoured. Subsequently we scrambled to the top, rattled back to the "shoulder," and should have been in Zermatt by 5 p.m. had I not made an unlucky remark concerning Geister and Todten Leute. These good (or bad?) people had been forgotten amidst the excitement of the climb, but my unlucky remark awakened Burgener to the imminence of the catastrophe that must necessarily overtake us. For some reason which he could not make very clear, he considered it certain that the Geister would either push us off the mountain or drop something hard and heavy on our heads before we reached the point where the new hut now stands. It was in vain I pointed out to him that the various supernatural powers would be able to effect our destruction as easily in Zermatt as on the mountain. Burgener, whilst admitting the theoretic excellence of my doctrine, evidently did not accord it any actual acceptance. His position on this subject appeared to be as illogical as his views on Sunday mountaineering. On this latter great question, he holds that

difficult expeditions are an obvious and distinct "tempting of Providence." Easy expeditions, on the other hand, he considers may be undertaken, for, says he, on such and such mountains you can hang on no matter what happens, and he proceeds to back up this opinion with arguments of a painfully materialistic type. In the present instance he clearly thought that the natural advantages of the ground would give us a good chance of defeating the lurking enemy. We descended with the utmost elaboration of care, only one moved at a time, and constant entreaties were even then required before rope enough was paid out to enable anybody to move. These elaborate precautions were backed up by a great profusion of pious (and sometimes the reverse) ejaculations, and we each vowed a candle of peculiar splendour and size to a saint of Burgener's acquaintance, subject, of course, to the provision that the said saint enabled us to baffle the malignant Geister. When we had duly arrived on the Furggen glacier, Venetz suggested a doubt as to whether the saint had really earned the candles. He showed us a small necklet he was wearing, which contained the tooth or thumb-nail, or other decaying debris, of an exceptionally holy saint, and which, he averred, was, as cricketers would say, "quite able to lick all the Zermatt Geister off its own bat." However, Burgener assured me that, in bargains of this sort, it is always the better plan to pay, "especially," he added, "when a few francs are alone at issue." So we subsequently duly discharged our debts. We got back to Zermatt

just in time for *table d'hôte*, after a day of the most varied interest and excitement.

The next day we walked, railed and drove back to Chamonix. Our minds were chiefly occupied with the various apparitions we had encountered. Burgener, after a protracted talk with the priest at Stalden, had come to the conclusion that the candles and Venetz's amulet would have been wholly ineffective against Todten Leute, and that, consequently, the apparitions we had seen could not have been real, bona fide specimens. My explanation of the will-o'-the-wisps was accepted, and they were dismissed as mere natural phenomena. But it was less easy to dispose of the light on the Gorner glacier. Burgener and Venetz thought that probably a big lump of gold had seen fit to "wachsen"¹ on or near the glacier, and they supported this theory by much ingenious argument. Was there not gold in the Macugnaga valley? And if there was gold on one side of Monte Rosa, why not on the other? Now it is evident that the only way in which gold could get there would be by a "wachsening"² (if that is the right derivative) process, and if this happened at Macugnaga, why not in Zermatt? It was further obvious that, during the growing stage, gold would be likely to shine with just such a light as we had seen. I was prepared to accept all these propositions, but I could not agree that gold in its infantile stages would be likely to take such idiotic and senseless walks on the glacier. On the other hand, I pointed out that the place was

¹ "Grow."

² "Growing."—Ed.

well suited to be the home of a dragon, and the movements we had seen appeared exactly appropriate to what is known as that reptile's habits. The men, however, were deplorably sceptical on this point, and even with the well authenticated instances related by Scheuchzer to back me, they would not admit the existence of this most interesting animal.

On our arrival at Chamonix, a friend joined our councils and threw fresh and startling light on the problem. A girls' school, with mistresses and all the paraphernalia of learning and wisdom, had been staying in Zermatt. Wishing to acquire close and intimate acquaintance with a glacier, they had walked up to the Gorner and scattered themselves about the ice. One of the girls, with the instincts of a born mountaineer, fearing to be late for the *table d'hôte*, had tracked back by herself. Accordingly, when her companions were once more assembled and ranged under the stern eye of the "genius tutelary," her absence excited alarm, and the whole school once more distributed itself over the glacier, seeking for some traces of the lost demoiselle. The sun meanwhile set, and both teachers and taught found themselves unable to escape from their entanglements. Monsieur Seiler ultimately became alarmed, and sent a guide with a lantern to look for them; and this guide spent the rest of the night in rescuing the disconsolate maidens from the various holes and chasms into which they had fallen.

Thus Burgener's hopes of fortune, and mine of discovering a real nineteenth-century dragon, were

rudely shattered. Still, as Burgener said, Geister or no Geister, we had had a splendid day, and stored up memories that would last us through many a winter evening. He added "it was a pity we were in such a hurry about those candles."

~~Again~~

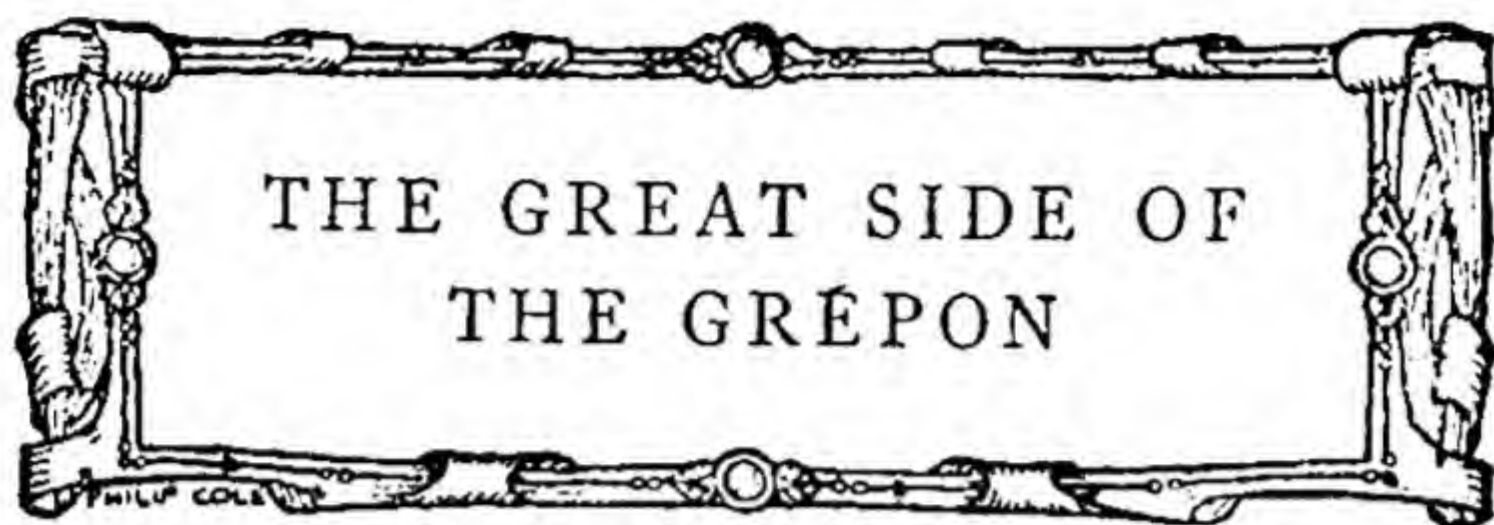
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This expedition is quite different in character from any which precede it in this book. It is an example of an "exceptionally severe" modern rock-climb, a successful assault on the precipitous face of a mountain which can be more easily climbed from another side. The GRÉPON (11,444 feet) is one of the Chamonix Aiguilles—roughly one of the lower summits on the north shoulder of Mont Blanc (15,782 feet)—and its huge 3000-foot rock precipice which plunges to the Mer de Glace had not before been climbed. The climb was made by a very strong party of five; Geoffrey Winthrop Young, perhaps the most famous of modern English climbers (the loss of a leg in the war put an end to his serious climbing), his guide, Josef Knubel, who led this ascent and is reputed to have been as fine a climber as ever lived, H. O. Jones and R. Todhunter, both expert "rock" men (both were subsequently killed on mountains, Jones by a fall on Mont Rouge and Todhunter while climbing in the Dolomites), and the guide Henri Brocherel. It would take a lot to turn back such a party, and as things turned out they made an ascent which for prolonged severity has rarely been equalled before or since.



THE GREAT SIDE OF THE GRÉPON

BY GEOFFREY WINTHROP YOUNG

(From *On High Hills.*)

What if I live no more those kingly days?
 their night sleeps with me still.
I dream my feet upon the starry ways;
 my heart rests in the hill.
I may not grudge the little left undone:
I hold the heights, I keep the dreams I won.

GREAT artists have claimed that their world held no higher pleasure for them than the sight of a white expanse of wall, which they were free to fresco in imagination with creatures more perfect than any which their hand could afterwards execute. And yet they tell us that the creative impulse of their craft has driven them impatiently to the doubtful attempt. To a mountaineer there is no less enchantment in the prospect of a fair wall of untouched rock, upon which his fancy is at liberty to trace innumerable ideal lines. And he can claim the same indulgence as the artist for the impulse which compels him, as a craftsman, to take the earliest opportunity of translating his perfect vision into mediocre performance. A mountaineer's failure, at least, botches no surface. Even his success reduces by no more than the breadth

of a single line the expanse left virgin for the enterprise of his successors.

When I passed along the Mer de Glace under the great precipices of the Grépon during the summer which followed the ascent of them which I shall be describing, their ardent memories were veiled behind unseasonable ice. They looked as if no cloud had ever clung successfully to them, much less a sequence of solid boots. The traces of our conflict and of our companionship were as lost as the echoes of our voices. My first thought was of satisfaction: it is opportunity for new achievement which each succeeding generation needs to develop its initiative; not the evidence, nor even the memory of the achievements of its predecessors. An untroubled mountain-face does more than any number of cross-looking diagrams to provoke enterprise. But with the afterthought came a regret: the impressions of that day had been too virile, the exploits of our leader too heroic, for me to wish for them no longer continuance than that of our own short memories. It would have been consoling to think that in some other dimension all that was good in them might be still surviving, adding something to the impetus towards bold adventure, unperceived itself but imperishable as a movement, like the ripple-rings of a raindrop on the face of the sea.

The best product of human life is its relationships. The faultless affection which may exist between two faulty natures is in itself a separate personality, and one more deserving of remembrance than either of

the characters from which it emanates. For our human relationships, and not for ourselves as individuals, we would, if we could, claim immortality. In that same dimension would survive the relationships, likewise greater than ourselves, which we can establish with less animate nature, with ennobling presences such as mountains. And there, too, would be gathered the separate personalities, better semblances of our own, created during our unselfish moments of combined action, under circumstances of danger or of wonder.

We all needed a breathing-space that season. Our previous adventures had left us restless, our nerves edged by the long, close companionship and by the strain of common excitement. A break of singleness and silence among unreceptive peaks suggested itself as the remedy. Josef Knubel followed in the slow train of our luggage round to Chamonix. H. O. Jones and Todhunter disciplined themselves by crossing Mont Blanc once again; this time with Henri Brocherel, and by the Rochers Rouges. For my own tonic, I idled up under the trees to the col du Géant; and the next day sped peaceably down the icefalls and the long glacier to the Montenvers. Even on the higher plateaux there was little snow of concealment for the crevasses. The frank difficulties of the open *séracs* were only a diversion. These lonely days, when they come of their own accord, are the reward for many years of apprenticeship. When eye and hand and foot can be relied upon to act together for our security all but automatically, the hour may come when we can feel free of care for the way, free to

sink our consciousness wholly in our surroundings. This is the supreme joy of solitary wandering—self-forgetfulness: the merging of our own identity in every detail and fanciful suggestion of our changing environment.

It was something of a "sentimental journey." Every jagged skyline high in the blue afternoon was an old hunting-ground. Almost every vista opening up the sunny side-glaciers was associated with some camp of uneasy sleep or nervous night-grey start upon new adventure. The mere sense of irresponsibility was exhilarating. There was no reason for sitting down on one island-rock in the wilderness of ice more than upon another: so to sit down or not to sit down anywhere seemed equally daring and delightful. There was no reason for getting up again at one moment rather than at another; so to get up, or to lie back more deliberately and stare into the confusion of peak and sky, had all the excitement of an inspiration. There was no reason for going fast or slow; so pace and mood went in step, unnoticed and refreshingly ungoverned. In the morning the craning head of the Aiguille du Géant had seemed to be exercising a prying supervision. But after a grown-up game of hide-and-seek with its inquisitiveness down the big *séracs*, both its head and the game passed out of mind among new trivialities. On the lower levels of the ice sea even that last Alpine instinct, for the "clock," dissolved in luminous vagueness. Noon-glare, sunset, moonlight, any obscurity would serve for the last miles of rambling over the

started cracks in the great unreflecting mirror, and down to the Montenvers. Not to have thought consciously for hours of wholesome activity is happiness. But rarely can we light upon a way so nicely aligned between excitement and monotony as to render unthought possible.

Reunited, refreshed, and all five in company, we moved up to a former camp, an oasis of sand, lichen and moraine above the glacier and under Trélaporte. Todhunter, in his record of our climb, has reflected upon the absence of soup that night, and upon the lack of sympathy we showed for each other's lonely searchings for lost objects in the dark moments of the next day's awakening. Indeed, we were bemused with weeks of mountain air and action, drowsy with the magic of the stars. The stars never seem so near as when we are lying alone at night on the breasts of hills; when we half waken in the dark to feel the stir of the dawn-wind filling the lungs of earth under us like the sighing of sleep and lifting, lifting us nearer to the laughter of the skies, closer to the discovery of the secrets which the stars are whispering across our faces, and through our half-open eyes to the still dreaming world.

An unseemly and unlikely party, we yawned the wrong way over the shoulder of Trélaporte, and slipped our sacks and sat down at the head of every greasy grass gully. The dank night-moisture of verdure-clad rock is an offence in the dusky hours, slimy and ominous as estuary mud. The craving of insufficient sleep was upon us, an oppression peculiar

to times of rude health and placid thinking. In the war-years, who noticed how little or how broken was his light, listening sleep? But how often in the holiday weeks of the Alps has the soul ached, even in dreams, at the prospect of hearing the fateful knock of the "two-handed engine at the door," and longed disgracefully even for rain to postpone its interruption. When we came up over the shoulder, and on to the small hanging glacier below the Grépon precipices, we set down our sacks in a formal row, as if for ever; and sat upon them, gazing hopelessly into a heartless world. I know I wished desperately for a miracle: that something would dissipate the rest of the party, painlessly of course, into the landscape, and that—incredible thought!—I should be left undisturbed to droop as I sat into exquisite sleep. But the momentum of our uncertainty as to each other's degree of demoralisation drove us on to our feet again at last, and up to the great bergschrund under the Grépon rocks.

And then and there the story of Galatea was repeated—as it always is among mountains if our lifeless limbs, heavy at starting as unquarried stone, can only hold on long enough against lethargy and shadow. But, for once, it was not sunrise which breathed the miracle of life into them. The bergschrund which I had twice before crossed slightly during earlier explorations of the cliffs, had fed on unusual heat and waxed fat; and now it kicked. Its upper ice-lip, scornfully up-curved some twenty feet above our heads, defied us to bridge the chasm at



THE SUMMIT OF THE GRÉPON

any point. This was too much. We might be ready to turn back at our own inward whisper of "sleep." But to be defied by the morning gape of an initial bergschrund barely a few hundred feet long——! We hurled ourselves into a very difficult turning movement, up a sneer of adhesive snow which prolonged the ice-grin on to the adjoining cheek of bare rock. The effort tuned us up. We cut steps on a diagonal back to our left, up the all but vertical ice above the schrund; and at last got our feet on to the good red rock. Then, like a slow-coiled spring released, we went off with a bang.

There are few tracts that suggest a moon-world of primitive matter so starkly as this glacis of the Grépon, a welter of red and yellow and ashen slabs, water-smoothed and tip-tilted at vast irregular angles. We had roped at the schrund; but we had worked too long together that year for the long rope to exert its usual check upon pace, or even upon consciousness. The great Red Tower, which stands upon the slabs like a sentinel, and which marked the limit of all previous explorations, was soon close above us; and then behind us. We sped on and up, following the indefinite gutter of a lost but lively little stream; until the knees of the four-thousand-foot precipice bumped out at us, and we had to draw breath for the beginning of our serious work, and make our choice of line for the day.

There are no allowances for "first faults" on this ascent of the Grépon. As it was hit off in the beginning, so the line soars straightly with us, to whatever

end we have merited; and there is only one right line. Above us, and a little to our left, a prodigal cascade of yellow slab swept down from the sky-ridge. Away up, and more to the left, these slabs were bounded by a greyer rib, which seemed to mount far towards the highest summit. Above us, and on our right, a second, slighter rib slanted up towards a more northerly peak. Up one or other of these two ribs lay the only climbs offering any chance of continuity. But the rib above on the right did not lead to the highest summit—and it had been climbed before. Somehow or other we must make a lodgment on the lower end of the left rib; and that before we found ourselves floundering among the yellow slabs, adrift upon the smooth billow of precipice already beginning to interpose between us and our solitary grey-ribbed hope.

Something was wrong with our leader. All down the rope came the shiver-on-the-brink feeling. And indeed the prospect of taking hold, of committing ourselves finally to the wrestle with those gruesome slabs, might dispose any mortal to shrink rather than to start. We seemed to be compromising, pit-a-pattering. We had traversed tentatively to the right; and now back again to the left, on a wrinkle-scramble of least resistance. This brought us near to the lifting rim of a huge gash down the crags; and beyond this again we could look across at a flat-backed chasm. It was a double line of vertical defences, which divided us grimly from the butt-end of our rib of hope, still far above us on the left.

It looked to be time to get to grips with this crossing. Josef was climbing petulantly. This was the crucial point, obvious to him as to us. But he did not even pause before fighting away up the wrinkle-crag to the right again, keeping up a cross-clatter of ejaculations with Brocherel which smothered any murmurs. His very fashion of "launching away" made one smile: it was so clearly not "meant." I looked up. On the line the men were resuming we might spend a number of invaluable hours in forcing a few hundred feet of tautening slabs; and then we should be immobilised upon a blank and ghastly wall, as helpless as cows upon ice. If we could not rush the defences on our left, and cross on to the grey rib at this the latest possible point, the game would be up—and we should not. It was no use arguing: Josef's back, as he scrambled up the slabs with unnecessary emphasis, told me that he knew what I was thinking, and thought the same, but that having decided in himself that the traverse was hopeless he was taking this method of demonstrating the futility of the whole climb early in the day. His variable hill-mood had every ground for mistrust. This aspect of the Grépon resembles the inner surface of a broken potsherd. It looks to be concave throughout its height; and the milder curve near the bottom steepens progressively upward, to an overhanging rim at the top. If our insectship were already crawling up the milder angle with difficulty, what measure of daylight or of clingfulness would serve to see us up the incalculably worse beyond?

I unroped, and traversed warily upward to the left, over the rock vallum, and across the fosse; until I could look down into the second chasm or couloir. It looked an obvious channel for falling stones. So I waited for a few formal seconds, to see if any fell. Meanwhile I scraped clear a knob on the brink, which seemed designed to hold a doubled rope for our sheer descent into the chasm. Once down, the traverse across the polished back of the trough should go, I thought; and there, a little above, over its farther wall, rose a series of sloping ledges and fillets, such as, with one or two permissibly doubtful steps, must lead us up, and up, and out on to the promised landing of grey rib!

I chuckled inwardly; and called to Brocherel to come down and across from above, and to H. O. Jones to come up and across from below, so as to give me enough rope for the experiment. Josef of course joined us; and while we arranged the rope round the knob, and I lowered myself into the couloir, he cast a dangerous eye over the position, and remarked blandly that it was all very well to get down, but how, if we were beaten higher up, were we to re-ascend this sheer wall without the rope from above? It was a pertinent question—although had his mood been normal the matter of return was not one Josef would have bothered about. I glanced up, and round, examining every discoloration upon the smooth rock chute as I clung. It would never do to be caught out at the start of such a deliberate schism: more was at stake than a mere ascent of the Grépon!

Then I waved my hand reassuringly—as if I had seen it all along—towards a miniature lanchard high up on the far wall of the couloir. It was an unassuming stance even for these rocks; but so placed that a second man could from it safely belay the leader for his re-ascent of the “cut-off,” if we had in fact to turn back. Josef subsided gracefully. He did not believe, I am sure, that I had discovered that bracket before I had started the traverse; but the gods were evidently fighting for the other point of view, and that was sufficient for his mountainy temperament. From that moment he flung himself into the struggle as if certain of victory. The backwash from his new confidence overran the whole party. For the rest of the day we could be content to concentrate each upon our own delectable holds, and watch with admiration the battle between the midget and the mountain raging above our heads.

So,

to the hills,—

For earth hath this variety from heaven

Of *pleasure* situate in hill and dale—

Light as the lightning-glimpse, they ran, they flew.

Our party fared indeed better than the Miltonic angels; for the Grépon hurled no mountain-tops upon our heads. For all that, the traverse of the couloir was not easy—the holds were but filmy; and we raced across it with one eye upward for the stones that did not fall. And yet, anything seemed kindly as an escape from our initial experiences on the yellow slabs.

The ascent up the far wall of the chasm went nobly. Short as the distance which we had ascended appeared, as compared with the perpendicularity still awaiting us above, we had already been involved among hollow slabs and hollower doubt for five and a half hours. So we settled ourselves on the genial jut of the grey rib, and breakfasted, and talked of past successes to keep up the psychic barometer; while the often-pictured "Crag on the Grépon" reared its warning head over us, high above on the farther left. If ever a speculative eye wandered away up the waterfall of smooth slabs from which our rib emerged but hesitantly, we recalled it, with a bright dutiful smile upward at our one thread of hope, that suggestion of linking notch and crack which seemed to connect our perch with the remote impending skyline.

We crept onward, up the rib; and came almost at once upon a triangular level platform fitted into a rock corner, so restful and singular that we unanimously voted it a name—the "Niche des Amis." Josef, still trying to preserve his dignity of gloom—in the seconds when he remembered it!—said it would do well for our night-bivouac when we were turned back. We left it by a memorable crack, a forty-five-foot right-angled and vertical corner, with just one upright slit for the hand to shift up in, and a convenient leaf for one thrusting foot.

Above this, chimney and slab and flake followed in too lavish and rapid succession to allow of orderly recall. Often the rock was actually overhanging, but

it was magnificently rough and firm; the usual hold was an under-pull for the hands and friction for the feet. H. O. Jones has written of this section: "At nine we were off once more, and from this time until the summit was reached at two, the climbing was always difficult, usually exceedingly difficult, twice verging on the impossible, but—it was undoubtedly superb!" It would be impossible to describe our line in detail. It cannot be mistaken, because there is no alternative. All that need be said is that we seemed to be clinging up a one-and-only feasible life-line wavering over the very break of a thunder of hopeless slabs. The strands of this life-line of cracks were stretched so thin that after every panting fifty-foot struggle I hardly dared look upward at the next loom of rock breakers, lest, this time, a link might have snapped, and one of the ninety-nine probabilities, of a holdless section intruding, might have at last obliterated our hundredth chance, the persistent little miracle of the connected chain of trifling faults.

Above us the contracting, steepening uprush of russet slabs crested over against a dead-blue sky. Below us they sank abysmally, to a white dazzle of glaciers, through which the chequered moraines broke darkly, like tidal rock under a shallowing crawl of surf. Had there been time to think, that overbearing menace of height above us might have become insufferable. But warm, gritty flake and crack and angle took us comfortably by the hand and foot, and drew us on and up, with little nips and prods of encouragement. Even hard-trained muscles grew tired

of their own satisfaction. Often enough they rebel against single feats beyond their strength. But I remember no other occasion upon which they creaked and murmured at the mere continuance of varied and pleasurable exercise within their powers.

Our rib-wrinkle struggled upward long and gallantly. We clung to it as to a happy straw of disturbance parting the glassy planes of a waterfall. But where the Crag on the Grépon showed close above on the left, and the peak began to collect all its smooth ferocity for the violent jet of its summit aiguilles, the riblet gave up the fight, protesting in an odd little spurt of rock which projected from the machine-cut slabs like a camel's hump. It was a last hummock of support, with a white saddle of snow thrown carelessly on behind it. Here we assembled; and Todhunter, who was climbing last on the rope, materialised for us again agreeably. For many hours—so steep and continuous was the angle of ascent—he had been for me only the glimpse of a small kid-gloved hand, fluttering out of nothingness deep below Jones's heels, and fingering delicately some spare coils of rope which he was taking in as he climbed unaided—to save time!

As we sat, and fed, and thought, we heard a thin unearthly hail; and looking upward, discovered in impertinent movement between the stable rocks and the still sky far above our heads the white face-specks of a party, craning over from the tip of the final tower to peer down upon us. Little wonder that they descended to Chamonix to spread report of a

"mad tea-party" clustered far down on the Mer de Glace face, certainly there for the night, and may be for ever. Some of us may even have shared their opinion, as we roosted upon our frivolous little hump. I hesitate to pronounce upon the emotions of an intelligent fly, as it sits on a picture-nail in a cathedral and looks up at the vaulting and down at the pavement; but I am certain that our outlook must have been much the same. And then—we were not flies!

However, Josef was by now keyed up well beyond any Grépon "pitch," and he rocketed off the saddle again, in the silent rush of inspired movement which best interpreted his mountain heart. A sequence of difficult cracks brought us up on to a narrow band of rock, which wound horizontally across the sun-scorched face, like a string-course round the contour of a campanile. On our right the ribbon ran out into gracelessness, upon extravagant precipices. We followed it to the left, over a blind corner; and it led us, Grépon fashion, to the foot of a lean chimney slitting cleanly and darkly up the cataract of slabs. For some two hundred feet, in part overhanging, it split the sheer wall above our heads. Then it appeared to evaporate upon lurching space, prospectless.

I skirted along the ribbon a little farther to the left. I thought I saw some chance of a hazardous traverse across to the fantastic needles crowning the main ridge, which was now sweeping upward and past us on the left on its way to the summit. But I could not discover any direct line up our wall other

than the chimney. Since that time Franz Lochmatter has proved me wrong. Had we gone yet a few steps farther round the bulge, we should have come upon an easier line of broken rock bending right-handed up the slabs, and rejoining our line above the miscreant crack. Possibly I was over-preoccupied with a fear lest, if we followed the ribbon too far, some of us might be tempted to escape across on to the skyline ridge, and so we should fail to complete our ascent by the Mer de Glace face of the peak. For the rest of the party it was sufficient that there had, hitherto, never been more than one line of advance, and that there before us—the chimney offered it!

We built a small cairn on the shelf at its foot, and strung ourselves out up its gripple narrows. At two-thirds of its height the chimney breasted out in an overhang. Josef passed me down his sack: an objectionable contingency to which I was now so accustomed in our partnership that I made a precautionary practice of rarely carrying one myself. He then wriggled up past the bulge, to some invisible ledge. Brocherel's bigger shoulders, broadened by his sack, jibbed so long at the same spot that I had time to grow cold on my eagle-spread of damp nick and nodule, and to begin to speculate on the displeasures of a return down the perpendicular vacancy revealed between my legs—always an enervating trick of thought. Jones and Todhunter "joined" me; that is to say, Jones's smile widened across emptiness immediately under my right boot; while, as I looked

down over the plumb-line of his back, I saw between his parted heels a gloved hand daintily rising into view, and still flickering its neat coils of rope.

In the meanwhile, Josef and Brocherel were audibly engaged with something particularly ferocious out of sight, and some sixty feet above my head. Josef's exclamatory shrills trickled down to me, and as I knew them to be his modal reflection of the penultimate phase in desperate climbing effort, I was induced to notice how ludicrously the rest of us were placed to resist any incidence of the unseen. With the realisation came the little fretful shivers and contractions of the muscles over the ribs and chest which give us the impression of the fluttering breath of fear. There followed a worse and very long moment of deep gasps, the rasp of scraping bootnails, and the tac and chink of the axe-point nicking into hard rock. The ultimate phase was in progress! The "axe-cling," and silence, were symptomatic of the calling up of Josef's last reserves! Axe-climbing was a freakish art, perfected by Franz Lochmatter and himself in the wild autumn weeks when the last tourist had departed, and they stormed in reckless company over their home-peaks after probably illicit chamois. I had seen them at such times glissading in rivalry down rubbly rock bluffs, at angles that the rest of us might hardly attempt on the better surface of smooth ice, and then pulling themselves up the rock again, where there was neither hand nor foothold, by arm-twists on their nicked axe-points. But now, in our present exposed position, even to think of such acrobatics

as in progress beyond the dark jut of invisibility above our heads was—distasteful!

Hours seemed to pass; so many, in seeming, that the little movement of the sun suggested that it too had been standing still to watch in wonder. A breathless croak of relief, and of summons, announced that Josef had arrived somewhere from nowhere. Brocherel followed it with a hoarse seamew-wail from the unseen that I was to join him, and that he was "good" to hold the rope, but not to help me with it. Below, we were chilled, and perhaps a little ruffled. When it came to axe-clings I preferred at least to be in a position to keep a reflective and upcast eye upon the dubious proceeding. I pushed off up the crack in a questionable humour that matched its own, and wrangled with it pugnaciously; until I arrived at the constricted, overhanging section. But there, try as I would, I could not force my shoulders, with the heavy sack, past the cloven breastwork:

Under the weight of mountains buried deep . . .
 Their armour helped their harm, crushed in and bruised
 Into their substance pent, which wrought them pain
 Implacable, and many a dolorous groan,
 Long struggling underneath, ere they could wind
 Out of such prison——

I let off some feelings by saying it would not "go" loudly and emphatically. Josef would have treated such formal protest in his usual manner, tightening the rope abstractedly and turning his watchful eye tactfully inward upon some mountaineering dream unconnected with the surface situation. Brocherel

had a shorter experience, and translated the protest into a bald bellow to Josef: "Monsieur ne monte pas!" Fine shades of temper were clearly wasted upon such crude interpretation. So up I wriggled. The chimney gave out upon a narrow gutter, under a brow-beat of slab. Up its frontal bone ran a perpendicular furrow; and straddled across this, where the brow-beat gave back a little above, Brocherel was balanced precariously on rudimentary holds. Just above his head a great dome of cliff boomed out in a steel-smooth overhang. Of Josef there was no trace. For a second I hardly dared let myself believe that he had escaped out of the trap; for the only conceivable exit lay up to the right and round the curved profile of the overhang, well above Brocherel's head, by the way of a pendulous noselet of rock which slanted into space from the underside of the dome. But there was no leisure even for incredulity. The rope ran up that way, out of sight. Brocherel was already making room for me, by hanging on to one knob with one nail while I moved up on to his "holds." Then, with grateful lightness for so large a man, he stepped up on to my shoulders, and thence on to my head, steadying himself with his hands against the smooth side of the noselet above him. Soon he was clinging with his knees over its aquiline tip; and then, out of my sight, and exclaiming and scrabbling furiously, and more and more remotely, up some hidden angle of impossibility.

H. O. and I repeated the preliminary tactics. From a comparatively restful standing-place upon his

capable head I squirmed with my knees up and over the odious parrot-beak, only to find myself, beyond it, committed by the rope to the precipitance of the unutterable slab which the overhang above had been hitherto concealing from us. There may have been air-pockets over the smooth face of that all but perpendicular slab: there was certainly no other perceptible irregularity. I slipped with my knees, slithered with hands and elbows, and flopped like a fish against the haul of the tight, thin waist-line. Just below my futile boots the slab slid over into space. Above my head it towered evilly—until in a high dark angle, between the outward leaning cliffs, it died away upon a sort of corner-bracket of hope. Out of this dark corner peered Brocherel's pallid face; while Josef's dark-puttied legs dangled down beside him, the rest of him hidden behind a belaying splinter of rock.

Exasperation was my only conscious feeling: a surprise of anger at the place being even worse than I had allowed for; irritation at my helplessness; vexation with Josef for attempting it, and vexation with my own vexation—for after all it was the best-worst way out of a cheerless position. Death may be as certain from above a hundred-foot drop; but imagination and the view down a three-thousand-foot wall can make a far more flustersome business of it! I might not pull myself up the rope with my hands—fatal temptation!—for that would prevent the men above from hauling it in, and so increase the risk with every foot I might gain. And apart from the rope there was no hold at all. I could but scuffle,

and try to spread myself adhesively, like butter—melting butter, on a tilted plate!

A microscopic crack sloping steeply upward appeared above me on the felt. I reached it. It was too small and shallow to admit even a finger-tip. But here and there in it I could see tiny dark spots, where Josef had snicked in the point of his amazing axe, and dragged himself up the slab by its single support. But how he held himself at that angle, and upon that surface, for the seconds during which he was shifting up the pick to a new hold—only he himself and the sky could know! I marvel even now to think of that lonely fight, far up ahead on the blind, leaning wall: a duel with immensity, uncheered, even unwitnessed.

Somehow it was over at last; and I had hold, panting and rope-rumpled, of Josef's dangling foot. And immediately the dread and vexation dropped behind and were forgotten, as is the way of our climbing humours. There remained only a bright froth of relief, and a sediment of annoyance that so stupendous a climb should be marred by one "impossible" section.

I saw to it at once that the spare rope should be sent down for the others, so that they might be relieved of some part of the unreasonable terrors of the slab. To get off the corner-bracket, and up the stooping angle between the cliffs, meant yet another short but severe struggle. And then we were out on a sociable sloping platform, where we could meet again, and rest, and talk out our remaining breath.

Josef was beyond any safety-valve of speech. If he attempted a compressed remark, he sizzled like an engine under too high a head of steam. To have checked him long might have been perilous; and at the first signal he was away with a leap that floated him out of sight in an instant. "The bottom of the mountains upward turned" could not now have smothered his soaring energy, much less any lighter obstructions which the Grépon had left in its skyey armoury. Mountains are as human as Milton's angels. We rarely find in climbing that they repeat a supreme resistance twice in the same form. Their capacity for offence is limited; and from a concentration of difficulties which has failed to check our advance they seem to require time to recover. Only if their offensive has succeeded, and they have thereby forced us to retreat, do they appear to be ready to strike again immediately, and harry our descent promptly and viciously.

We avoided the provocation of saying so aloud, but I think that we all began to feel, after this astonishing passage, that the victory in some form or another was, after all, to be ours. At the worst, we should not now have to return by the way we had come. The pinnacles on the mounting skyline of the main southern ridge were challenging us always more closely from across the brown precipices on our left. We could surely escape out on to them, if the wall of the final tower above us proved, on trial, to be as inaccessible as it looked. Josef yodelled at us, out of an invisible kink in higher space. A lively,

aspiring chimney of some hundred and twenty brisk feet, suppld our muscles again after the halt, and discharged us from its muzzle in a shrapnel-shower up a following of steep slab and crack. Different anatomies can never reconcile their estimates of the same rock climb; an oblique, semi-detached monolith, some fifteen feet high, up which four of us, with our longer arms just jammed in its only crack, swarmed all unnoticed, appeared to Todhunter the crux of the whole ascent. For the first and only time the rest of us were gratified by an intermission in the neat coils of rope hunting below our heels, and the gloved hand seemed constrained for once to abandon its "time-saving" fashion of pursuit.

"It may be an excellent rule in rock-climbing," Todhunter records, "to keep the arms in reserve for some supreme effort that is never required, but on the final five hundred feet of the Mer de Glace face of the Grépon the rule is best honoured in a continuous breach. However, the end was now at hand. Another fifty-foot chimney, and the party were looking down on the Nantillons glacier from the well-known gap between the Pic Balfour and the summit. The great rock wall had been climbed; but the summit of the Grépon had still to be reached."

We were now gathered at the foot of the final problem—the upstanding red citadel of the Grépon. The crests of its southern *arête* notched the sky close above us on the left. Unanimously we had swung out to the left, and up on to the breach under the Pic Balfour, more, I think, to enjoy the contrast of

a wide view and open breath than with any idea of finishing the ascent from this side. The magic of the view from alpine heights owes much of its effect to contrast: all that we see from a summit is ablaze and a-tingle with the relief of our own recovered freedom of sight. We had plenty of daylight in hand, and an increased confidence to bring to the examination of the impressive attempt before us. On the far, northern side of the citadel, both the crack of ordinary ascent and Venetz' original cleft were safely out of the way of our temptation, cut off from us by the sheer flanking walls. Above us, on the near side, as we stood in the gap, we could see the corner masking the Dunod chimney, by means of which—and of a doubled rope—the descent from the summit is usually made. We might be driven to ascend by this line as a last resort. It had been done with the help of a lasso; and could therefore, probably, be done without it. But the unsurpassable climbing on the gigantic red-brown slabs deserved an independent finish of its own. We were resolved, if possible, to end as we had begun upon the Mer de Glace wall, and make a new and through route from base to summit.

We redescended from the gap on to our wall, and returned round above the familiar abyss; scrambling along and up the sharp edge of a flake conveniently split off the face of the citadel. The flake brought us to the foot of a rift up the centre of the wall, the only flaw in the last defences. If I remember rightly, this rift corresponds to that of ordinary ascent up the northern flank; the two being formed by a single

cleavage of the vast block that constitutes the summit. But whereas the crack on the farther, Nantillons, face mounts as it were the convex back of the rock wave, that upon the Mer de Glace face is sucked up into the underside of its inclining crest.

Josef and Brocherel manœuvred, exclaimed and gritted off the spiny flake, and up into the splayed foot of the overhanging cleft. Brocherel, with his big head crushed skew-wise into his diaphragm by the rock, sprawled Promethean legs over invisible supports on the sloping floor of the gutter-shoot, and offered a pessimistic basis for Josef's acrobatics. The rest of us, clinging in a row underneath them, up the razor-edge of the flake—limpets or gargoyles above the profundity of red wall according to the point of view—followed their evolutions with cricked necks and tightening chests. The overhanging chimney was short. It looked to have something of the character of a Gothic niche for a saint, surmounted by a canopy. The back of the niche was cracked, and the crack was prolonged upward and outward through the canopy-bulge.

From a crouching balance on Brocherel's shoulder Josef hooked his axe-pick into the crack, high up at the back of the niche. With this for hold he wrestled upward, with his feet using press-holds against the outward-sloping walls of the niche, to a more secure position under the pendentive. Bridged and straddled high above our heads, he tried again and again to reach out and up, and squeeze some part of one hand into the thin crack above the projecting bulge. Josef's

reach is short: try as he might, writhe and grit furiously, he could not gain a secure hand-cling. Even the axe-pick refused to grip the fissure, since the rock, undercut below it, left the axe-shaft unsupported. The obstinate efforts were renewed time and again, until watching became intolerable. For a curious relief I glanced downward under my knee, where it rode the rough red edge of the flake, and dissipated sight more comfortably down the infinity of brown depth, and away across the white concord of glaciers—a level of restfulness so remote that even its ascending murmur seemed not to belong to our present.

A new sound from above recalled me. I looked up. Josef was in the throes of a last daring inspiration. He whipped his axe upward, balanced himself audaciously outward, and with lightning speed wedged the point of the axe-shaft into the crack above the bulge of the canopy, so that the axe-head projected horizontally and frailly into space, between our heads and the sky. Except for its sensational circumstance the next manoeuvre looked like a simple gymnasium trick. Using the wedged shaft as a horizontal bar, Josef dangled clear of the niche, and swung himself up on to it as adroitly as a Japanese juggler, until he was standing upon it—over us and nothingness. The rest of his climb looked to be a triumphal wedding-glide up a widening smile of appreciative chimney. But for minutes afterwards, while we shouted our admiration to all the echoes of the mountains, I could hear him fighting for breath, supine upon the

flat summit overhead, as surely Josef never panted on a rock before!

During our long suspense below, the rest of us had been agreeing in interrupted mutterings that for, perhaps, the first time in our lives we were all conscious of muscles frankly wearied out by the day-long persistence of unrelenting difficulty. Hope, sunshine, excitement, glorious rocks, training, and tried companionship, all the fuels that make of strength an inexhaustible flame—we felt them all still burning brightly within and without. And yet we had to admit that for anything beyond a certain routine of movement our machinery would no longer work. That any form of exertion could actually exhaust our muscular reserves, while the spirit and the will still remained vigorous as morning, was a novel discovery; and to be forced to recognise it at such a point both rueful and comic. But the small coruscation of steel, whalebone and mountain fire warring with all the earth forces above our heads seemed to be aware of no such limitation. As a manifestation of nerve, skill and power, Josef's issue from the niche would have been remarkable on an "hotel boulder" after an idle morning. Performed at the end of some ten hours of very exacting climbing and exploration, over a void that seemed to swallow the nerves into its yawn of hostile space, the feat seemed to us almost superhuman. The whole ascent will, I hope, often be repeated; now that the horrific slab has been eliminated there is no finer rock climb in the Alps. Knubel's crack will yield, each time more

readily, to longer arms; and our first estimate will, of course, be progressively reduced. But I have little fear that the applause with which we acclaimed the first passage will ever be thought exaggerated—by those at least who “lead” the crack themselves.

We had plenty of spare rope, and the actual height was not great. Brocherel entangled his bulk in a network of stout cord, made an athletic effort to shatter his way through the canopy, and, kicking and ejaculating, finished the rest of the ascent after the fashion arranged for their visitors by the monks of Meteor. Then the rope came down for me, and Josef had recovered sufficiently to beam down over the edge at my struggles and give them an unusual share of his discreetly abstracted attention. I was allowed to try the crack my own way; but, scraping and gnashing, I could no more emerge from that saintly sloping niche than if I had been respectably sculptured in stone and erected within it. Finally I tied on all the loose ends of rope within reach, took a firm hold of any others that promised connection with the ultimate, and arrived on the summit, safely enmeshed. The others wasted less time, and joined us—equally “meteorically.”

The flat table-top of the Grépon must be the meeting-place of numberless happy memories; but it can never have supported a more reminiscent and more luxuriously prostrate gathering. The sun had waited for us, and met our eyes on a long level of golden placidity, as welcome as had been its tranquil support during the fighting hours of the day. All the

world seemed to be open, shining, before our thought, even into its most sombre corners of cobweb and puzzlement. A philosophy of life which is based upon getting admirably tired, and then dreaming the universe into shape through the coloured moments of reaction, is, probably, open to criticism. But it may be that some of us, of the less intellectual habit, require some ten to fifteen hours of hard rhythmic exertion, before our ill-balanced energies of mind and body can achieve the working harmony or symmetry, the equable outlook and in-look, which are essential for our appreciation of the few glimpses into understanding permitted to us—and then only in our instants of self-forgetful rest.

As we drifted down the ordinary descent of the Grépon, the rope which still bound us together on the obverse of our great wall served as a reminder that there was still earth under our feet. The sense of a good hope fulfilled and of every healthy desire of the body contented might otherwise have persuaded us that we were wind-travelling, upon the buoyant wings of a serene heart. Is there any other human experience so complete, so rounded off in its actions and reactions, as a great and successful mountain climb? In snatches we recalled to each other the impressions of the day, as they fluttered into memory at their pleasant will. But all the time we were looking out over a choric movement of evening mists, at the last tableau in a pageant of gorgeous light, a pageant in which we ourselves had some unexplained but sympathetic part. In mood, at

least, we were one with that higher and changing illumination. Our grumbling band who had lagged up Trélaporte the same morning must have belonged to an earlier, earthlier existence, of drab spirit cluttered in dross.

Doubtless, I argued, as we paused on the glacier to coil up the rope, the philosophers of the street would call our state of mind a hallucination. Our poignant adventure, our self-sought perils on a line of unreason to the summit of a superfluous rock, have no rational, or moral, justification. Our consequent luxury of feeling has, therefore, no virtue or reality, except in an equally irresponsible imagination. But again I knew, in every fibre, that this was not so. And fortunately the purposeless splendour of the sunset, transforming the Jura into a coloured fairyland under our eyes, suggested an answer sufficient for the mood. For the sunset, too, was unreal, with neither moral nor object, and the effect of its beauty upon ourselves was but another product—if a more universally accepted one—of a romantic convention. And if both the sunset and the climb were unrealities, and their effects negligible or improper, the sincerest part of our personalities must belong to the same worthless category, for they were patently and wholly responsive to the unreal emotions which the sun and the mountain were producing! I felt I could be content to be irrational, or even immoral, in such good company. Every purified particle in me proclaimed that a good climb—and this had been of the best—was, for me, only a good thing, and as genuine an

influence as my sort of nature deserved. Sufficient of life, sufficient of discipline, sufficient of thought, for some of us, in the circle of mountain, sunset and new sunrise: sufficient not only as motive for our activity, but as inspiration in our time of rest.

Along the windings of the forest path down from the Plan des Aiguilles the last, motley plumes of failing light trailed through the branches and about our feet, feathers fallen from the wings of contentment which had seemed to bear us from the glaciers. As I watched them altering in darkness, and contracting to the twilight glimmer of the valley streams, I resolved that there should be no anti-climax: for me at least this completed and complete climbing day should form the close of the most perfect season of our alpine lives.

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LLIWEDD (2947 feet), a satellite of Snowdon (3560 feet), is a mountain with a curious knife-edge summit, and on its north side a thousand-foot rock precipice plunges down to the screes above Llyn Llydaw. This rock face offers some of the finest climbing in the British Isles; broadly speaking, it consists of a western buttress and an eastern buttress, divided by the central gully (which has not yet been completely climbed). Most of the easier climbs are on the western buttress, or on the west wall of the central gully; the eastern buttress is as a whole much steeper and smoother, and altogether more formidable, especially in its lower slabs. J. M. A. Thomson, who may be regarded as the founder of modern rock-climbing in this country, was the first to find any way up the eastern buttress; since his climb described here, many routes have been discovered, but they all have one factor in common—they are difficult and must be treated with respect. Modern climbers, using rubber soles instead of the old-fashioned nailed boots, have robbed many lesser mountains of their terrors, but the huge crags of the eastern buttress of Lliwedd, black and forbidding in appearance in the deep shadow that is the rule of this northern face, have retained and are likely to retain their mystery.



A BRITISH ROCK CLIMB

THE FIRST ASCENT OF THE EAST BUTTRESS
OF LLIWEDD

BY J. M. ARCHER THOMSON

(From the *Journal* of the Climber's Club, 1903.)

IN a revolutionary age when the words of the wise are on every climber's tongue, and the intention to obey them in few climber's minds, it is refreshing to record a striking instance of strict adherence to one of the cardinal canons of orthodox mountaineering.

We have been advised that before we try to climb a mountain we should look at it, and in the present case this unquestionable counsel has been conscientiously followed. We had looked at the East Buttress of Lliwedd for twenty years. It had indeed become a habit, if not with all climbers in the Snowdon cirque, certainly with those who knew by heart their West Buttress, to pause in passing, and scanning "with head awry and cunning eye" the gaunt slabs of the sister peak, to discuss the possibility of ascent. In conformity with this custom, O. Eckenstein and I, on our way down from Bwlch Goch on 23 April,¹ refreshed our recollection of the main features of the face. Sundry streaks and dots of snow so far aided

¹ 1903

our survey as to enable us to trace out to our complete satisfaction an elaborate route which seemed to promise success, or at least to be by far the most favourable line for an attack upon the formidable fortress.

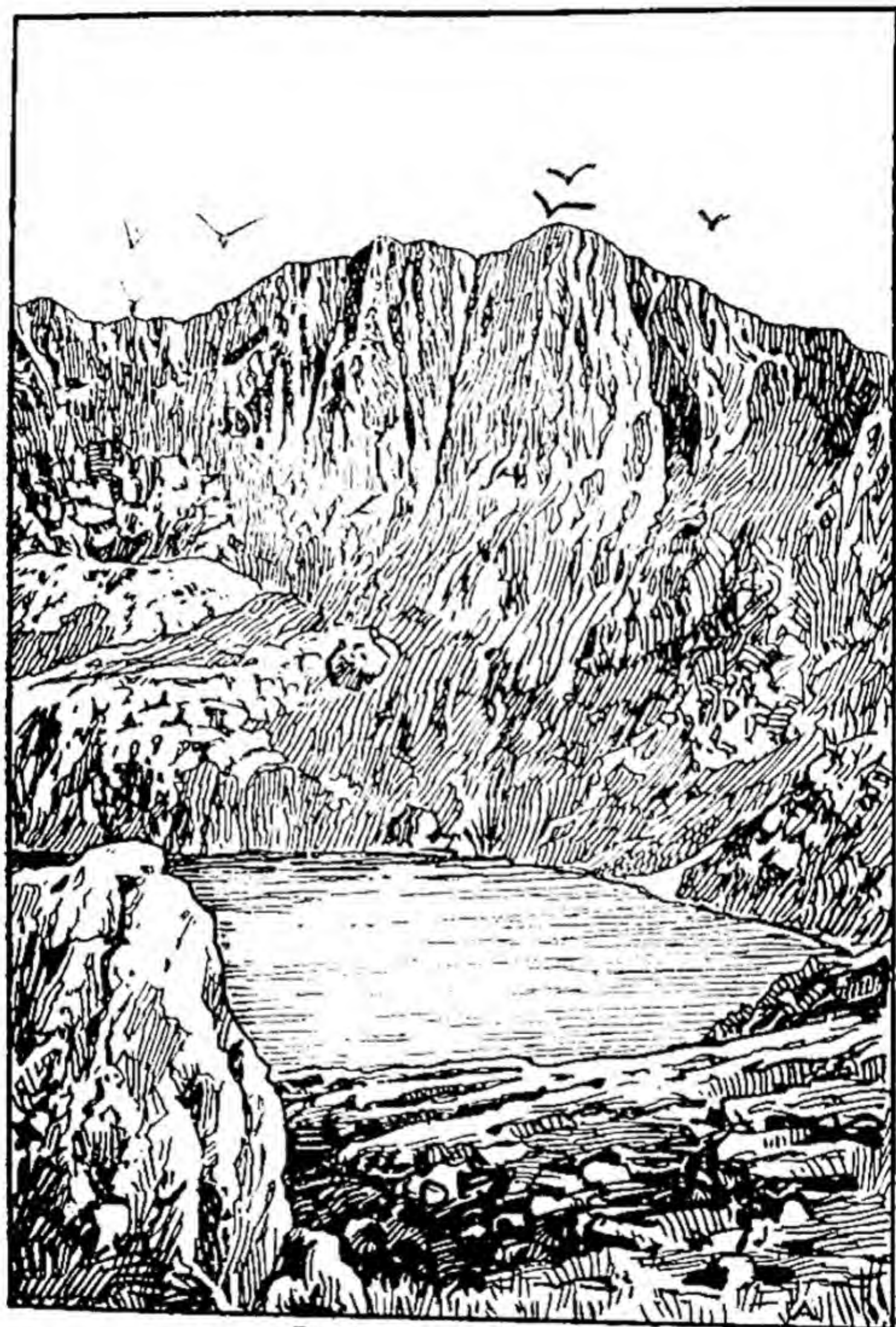
Early in the afternoon of the day following we were seated on the grassy *boncyns*¹ above Llyn Llydau, reconsidering our plans.

A glistening ribbon of snow and ice filled the sinuous crack, by which we were to have forced a route up the lower slabs. The question whether we should go up or forbear was referred to me for decision. The weather was bright and the rocks were dry, but the wind was blowing fresh from the north-east, and it was a matter of experience that even at this season the north-easter does not "stir our Vikings' blood" to the extent of rendering us immune from frost-bite. The route upon which we had fixed our hopes was definitely abandoned.

We now turned our attention to a small ledge a little above the scree, which may be said to run out horizontally from the east side to the centre of the buttress. It was impossible, from our standpoint, to form any opinion whatsoever of the character and potentialities of the slabs above, but the ledge would obviously serve as an initial base of operations. So without more ado, we reached the rocks and roped.

Our route lay up steep slabs and shallow chimneys of the type that may be loosely described as triangular in horizontal section. At the height of a hundred and

¹ Hillocks.—ED.



By kind permission of Messrs. G. P. Abraham

LLIWEDD AND LLYN LLYDAU

The East Buttress is to the left of the Central Gulley,
as seen in the picture.

fifty to two hundred feet, we reached one of those places which engross the whole attention at the time and afterwards dwell in the memory. Our line of ascent struck a niche in the rock having a sloping floor of the size and shape of a boy's kite, heather-grown and overspread with a thick layer of loose snow. The scarcity of good holds was all the more noticeable as the possibility of the turf sliding bodily away like a toboggan appeared by no means remote. Such spots we are apt to reach with satisfaction and to quit without regret. Dry summer weather would widen the margin of safety. It may, however, be useful to mention that, from a view obtained later, it appeared that a cleft on the right might prove a good alternative. At a slightly higher level it came as a surprise and a pleasure to discover a tapering rock standing stately as a statue in a recess on our right. So excellent was the anchorage afforded by this colossal belaying-pin that a burnt-offering was forthwith decreed to the Spirit of the Mountain—Eckenstein officiated in the sanctum, while I scrambled a little higher and, lowering into a sheltered nook, contributed my quota to the fragrant fumes that came curling in graceful columns along the grey rocks below.

Immediately above me there rose an oblique chimney, which was found to give out upon a smooth wall, but Nature has favoured the climber here, for from the upper exit the sharp *arête* of a thin rib can be reached without real difficulty.

The descent on each side of this rib is sheer, but

its crest gives an excellent line until, some fifty feet above, it terminates abruptly in a vertical wall, and progress in precisely the same line is effectually barred. The position here is very exposed, but the climber can hitch himself to a spillikin of rock and contemplate at leisure a striking view of the imposing crags that surround him.

Though disinclined to believe that we had arrived at an impasse, we anticipated difficulty in effecting an advance from this point. Stepping down from the *arête* on to a little ledge on the wall, we traversed a few yards to the left and discovered a chimney which had been invisible from above, and this proved to be furnished with holds sufficient for solving the problem.

At a higher level we entered a narrow chimney in yellow rock; the upper part is in my estimation decidedly puzzling, until the right hand can grasp a small peg of rock so placed as to test somewhat severely the length of one's reach. We emerged upon a heathery shelf, which we reckoned to be four hundred feet above the scree. It was the first spot we had struck large enough to afford sitting-room for the two of us. We made therefore a prolonged halt at this welcome *gorphwysfa*,¹ enjoying besides the familiar views, a very interesting outlook upon the West Buttress.

The steep wall above would offer a distinctly formidable obstacle were it not curiously ribbed and furrowed, bearing some slight resemblance to the

¹ Resting-place.—ED.

shell of a pecten, so that, when the groove first chosen ceases to be convenient, we have merely to adopt the simple expedient of stepping round an intervening rib into a parallel trough, for all give out eventually upon a good quartz ledge, which trends from this point westwards in the direction of Central Gully.

After constructing a cairn to mark our route, we followed this horizontal ledge to the foot of a snow-slope some eighty feet in height, and kicked steps up it. I was about to attack the rocks above, when Eckenstein called my attention to a narrow strip of snow on our left, indicating the existence of a ledge of some description, and proposed traversing along it. This proved an excellent suggestion.

Stamping steps with great care along this narrow ribbon, we gradually worked back to the centre of the face, and reached a conspicuous corner, marked by a massive block of white stone. From this *omphalos*¹ it seemed tolerably safe to prophesy that the chief difficulties of the ascent had been overcome, for we had reached the lower termination of a bold, sharply defined *arête*, which appeared to offer a practicable and interesting line of advance. Upon its jagged crest we found climbing of a particularly pleasing and exhilarating kind, and finally came out upon the summit ridge at the foot of the cairn.

The ascent occupied nearly three hours, exclusive of halts. No part of this time was either wasted in following false scents or devoted to exploration.

¹ Key-position.—ED.

Indeed, opportunities for lateral deviation are very restricted. On the other hand, progress was never rapid, as we took the precaution of moving one at a time practically throughout the whole climb.

While no very close comparison can be established between ascents of our own mountains and those of the Alps, yet *mutatis mutandis* this climb resembles in character that of the difficult part—between the shoulder and the summit of the Petit Dru. In both, a number of chimneys play an important part in the scaling of a generally smooth face. On the Swiss peak, one short pitch—that above the fixed stanchion—is of greater technical difficulty than any encountered on the present climb; on the other hand, the opportunities for safe anchorage are relatively abundant. The time taken on both occasions was the same, but we were a party of five on the Chamounix Aiguille.

The trite dictum that "whatever number on the rope is right, two is unquestionably wrong" may contain as much truth as any other proverb, but cannot, in my view, be regarded as applicable to ascents of every description. On the climb under consideration, as it is nowhere necessary to resort to combined tactics, a third man can add nothing to the strength of a party, while the presence of a fourth man on the rope would be so inconvenient as to materially increase the difficulty, and in fact to seriously imperil the safety of all.

That the climbing on the East Buttress would prove severer than upon the West has always been

anticipated, for the face is seen to be both steeper and smoother. It is, indeed, remarkably devoid of ample shelves and grassy ledges, such as occur so frequently and form so important a factor in the ascent of the sister peak. Other noticeable points of difference are the soundness of the rock and its freedom from vegetation, and these are advantages of no little importance in a climb of which the uniform steepness of gradient is perhaps the most characteristic feature.

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And now we come to EVEREST (29,002 feet), king of all mountains, still unconquered in 1933.¹ The story of the various attempts to reach the summit is long and dramatic, and cannot even be outlined in this short note. The problems are quite different from those of ordinary mountaineering; for example, there are political difficulties, there are the "physiological" difficulties—the problems of keeping alive at all at twenty thousand feet and higher—there are extreme difficulties of cold, wind, and snowstorm. From the four expeditions which have been made (the "Reconnaissance" of 1921 and the three assaults of 1922, 1924, 1933) many great names emerge: the two Bruces, Norton, Somervell, Odell, Morshead, Ruttledge, Smythe, to mention a few only. For the purpose of this book I have chosen two essays both of which concern George Leigh Mallory (1886–1924) who is in many ways the central figure of Everest history. Mallory was on three expeditions, and on each occasion he was the spear-head of the party, the man who was most likely to get to the top. He was a flawless climber, and where Everest was concerned he was indomitable; nor did he hesitate when the ultimate sacrifice was demanded. The essay that follows is Mallory's own account of the last phase of the 1922 expedition; then follows the account by N. E. Odell of the final assault of 1924.

¹ As this edition goes to press news comes that the Ruttledge Expedition is on its way home, defeated by bad weather after reaching a height of over 28,000 feet.



THE SECOND MOUNT EVEREST EXPEDITION

BY G. LEIGH MALLORY

(From the *Alpine Journal*, 1922.)

WHEN first the prospect of going to Mount Everest opened for me I used to visualise the expedition in my thoughts as a series of tremendous panting efforts up the final slopes. Later it became a symbol of adventure; I imagined, not so much doing anything of my own will, but rather being led by stupendous circumstances into strange and wonderful situations. Now it has become a problem, with no less interest, and even excitement, the expedition brings to my mind's eye a view of the long mountain slopes set at intervals with groups of little tents, with loads of stores and sleeping sacks, and with men. My object at present is to state this problem—partly because without it the story of our attempts cannot well be understood, and partly because the problem is still with us. Everest is not yet climbed. Nor do we know for certain that it can be climbed. But we may see how much nearer we are to a solution as a result of this year's expedition.

The first element in this problem is to supply a camp one stage below the North Col. The reconnaissance of last year had made it plain that this

could be done, but it seemed not unlikely with too great a strain; the difficulty is in bringing the porters fresh to this point. General Bruce has proved that this can be done, at all events with his guidance, and we were able to set out this year from our camp at twenty-one thousand feet with full confidence that our porters were in the best of strength and spirits.

The problem of climbing the mountain from that point to the summit, from twenty-one thousand to twenty-nine thousand feet, was left after last year's expedition briefly thus:—a way to the North Col at twenty-three thousand feet had been found in September, but it was by no means certain that this way would prove convenient, or even serve at all in May and June before the monsoon. Upwards from the North Col it was fairly certain that no great obstacle would present itself below the final ridge, and it seemed probable that the true north-east ridge to the summit, if it could be reached, would not be insuperable. Our experience in 1921 had also pointed to the period before the monsoon as offering the best chances of favourable weather. In such conditions as prevailed after the monsoon last year it was at all events certain that Mount Everest could not be climbed. Supposing, then, that all the conditions of the mountain should turn out for the best, what were the chances of success? It was known that men could climb to a height of 24,600 feet—the Duke of Abruzzi's record. It was certain, therefore, that they could exist a great deal higher, for the difference between breathing at rest and breathing with the effort of climbing

up is immense. My own experience led me to believe that it would be possible to climb at least to twenty-six thousand feet, and probably in one day, from the North Col. But the ultimate limit would be determined, not by a man's capacity when starting fresh on a single day, but when starting on the last of several days after using up his reserves of strength by successive efforts above twenty-one thousand feet; for the reserves are not made good by a night's rest at these great heights. There remained the problem of providing camps to allow the climbers to reach this theoretical limit, or the summit of Mount Everest if the limit were not lower than that. It seemed likely that the limit in practice would be determined, not by the endurance of the climbers, but by the capacity of the porters to carry loads above twenty-three thousand feet, and by the organisation of transport within their powers.

Considering this year's expedition with reference to this problem, the climbing party was first concerned with the way up to the North Col. It was obvious to all of us, when we reached the Base Camp and could study the conditions of the mountain, that many of the slopes were icy, even on the north face. Strutt's party returning to the Base Camp on 8 May gave a gloomy account in that respect. The almost level glacier was remarkably icy up to 20,500 feet. Somervell and I, when we went from the Base Camp on 10 May, with orders to act independently and get as high as we could, fully expected prolonged step-cutting up to the North Col. On 13 May we set forth

from Camp 3 with one coolie. Of the slopes which Bullock and I had used in our ascent to the North Col last year, all except the final and steepest one were glittering ice. But we saw that by cutting up a short, steep slope at the bottom we could reach a gently sloping corridor, and so reach that final slope which was the key to the ascent. Choosing this way we found good snow almost continuously above the first ice. Thus we avoided, not only for that occasion, but for the whole of the prolonged assault, a great labour and a great danger. It is essential to have a way up to the North Col where the coolies can very largely look after themselves, and, as it was, the labour of getting up on that first occasion proved quite sufficient.

On the North Col a quite unexpected difficulty arose. The final slope I spoke of gives out on to a wide snow-shelf. Above it is an ice-cliff, broken occasionally by deep fissures. Last year we had easily found a way round this obstacle in the direction of Mount Everest, and so reached the lowest point of the col. Somervell and I now found this way barred by an impassable crevasse. We stood at the edge of it for a little while, wondering whether it could really be true that we had come so far to be baulked by a crevasse, and debating the use of a ladder. Then we went back and explored in the direction of the North Peak. We found a steep way up at the farther end of the ice-cliff, and after leaping two large crevasses proceeded along the hummocky and broken ground beyond; at length we saw a clear

way to the level snow from which the north ridge springs. But it does not follow that a party of the future will be so fortunate. One might well be cut off altogether in such a place, which evidently changes a good deal from year to year, and in a country where wood is difficult to obtain another expedition would do well to equip itself against this contingency.

On 13 May, then, we had taken the first step towards establishing Camp 4. The one porter had carried up one tent. Nothing more could be done until more porters were available. Fortunately the transport arrangements below were now working so satisfactorily that, on the 15th, Strutt, Morshead and Norton were able to join us at Camp 3, and we were able to keep eight coolies from their convoy.

We had now to decide how best under these circumstances to tackle the problem, and principally whether we should attempt to make two camps or only one above Camp 4 at the North Col. The question, when we came to examine it in detail, was practically decided for us; with only nine, or possibly ten, coolies immediately available, the operation of providing a No. 6 camp, involving nearly double the labour of providing only Nos. 4 and 5, would take too long, besides in all probability demanding too much of the porters. As it was we had a margin of strength—an invaluable margin. The plan allowed two coolies for each of four loads from Camp 4 to Camp 5, and it was hoped that by this arrangement they would be able to reach twenty-six thousand feet. The ten more

loads were carried to Camp 4, under the North Col, on 17 May.

On the 19th we left camp at 8.45 a.m., carrying up bedding and all warm things available for the porters. The day was fine and sunny. At 1 p.m. Norton and I were putting up tents, while Morshead and Somervell were fixing one more rope between the terrace of our camp and that of the col itself. These domesticities occupied the afternoon, and when sundown came at 4.30 we turned in for the night, all well and fairly comfortable, proudly possessing six thermos flasks.

Prospects seemed extraordinarily promising. It was our intention to carry on in the morning only four loads—two of the smallest tents, two double sleeping-sacks, food for one and a half days, cooking pots, and two thermos flasks. Our nine porters, who were housed three apiece in Mummery tents, were perfectly fit, so that we had two porters for each load, even so having a margin of one porter. Everything had been managed so happily and satisfactorily that there was hardly a doubt that the men would be able to establish camp higher up the mountain on the morrow.

On 20 May sunlight hit the tents at 5 a.m. according to our time. I immediately got up to rouse the party. There was no sign of life in the porters' tents, which were hermetically sealed. Muffled responses from the interior carried no conviction of minds alert and eager. It was necessary to untie the elaborate fastenings by which the flaps were secured. The porters,

I found, were all unwell—we eventually ascertained that four of them were seriously mountain-sick. Five were willing to come on. It was hardly surprising that they felt better when they were persuaded to come out of the unventilated tents.

Further delays were caused by the cooking operations. It was easy to make tea with the water from our thermos flasks, but we had decided to start the day with a handsome dish of spaghetti. Unfortunately the two tins provided for that purpose, instead of being gently nursed the night long near the warmth of human bodies, had been left out in the cold snow, and edible spaghetti was eventually produced only after prolonged thawing.

We started in the end an hour late, at 7 a.m., quickly making our way to the North Col, whence a broad snow-ridge ascends at a gently increasing angle. It was clear that sooner or later steps would have to be chipped in the hard surface. We were able to avoid this labour at first by following the stone ridge on the west side.

Morshead, if good cheer be a sign of fitness, seemed the strongest and went first; we proceeded at a satisfactory pace in the fine early morning. Perhaps, after all, we should camp at the required height of twenty-six thousand feet.

"Illusory hope of early sun begot!" We presently became aware that it was not a perfect day: the sun had no real warmth, and a cold breeze sprang up from the west. I found myself kicking my toes against the rocks for warmth whenever we paused,

and was obliged to put on my spare warm clothes—a Shetland woolie and a silk shirt. The porters were evidently feeling the cold more acutely the higher they went. The ridge of stones ended abruptly, and it became clear that if we were to establish a camp at all, we must race for shelter to the east side of the ridge. Cutting steps at high altitudes is always hard work. The proper way to do it in hard snow is to give one blow with the ice-axe and then stamp the foot into the hole just made; but such a blow requires a man's full strength, and he must kick hard into the hole. On the higher Himalayas the amateur will probably prefer to make two or three chips of a feeble sort in cutting his steps. In any case, three hundred feet of such work, particularly if hurried, is extremely exhausting, and we were glad to rest at length about noon, sheltered under rocks at about twenty-five thousand feet.

There was no question now of getting our loads much higher before camping. The porters would have to return to camp; it would have been an unwarrantable risk to expose them further in such conditions; they must be sent down before they were frost-bitten and before the weather could change for the worse. Under other conditions it might have been necessary for some of us to accompany them on their way down; now they could safely be sent alone. No camping-place could be seen where we were, so we crossed round to the sheltered side, vaguely hoping that one might present itself. Eventually the porters with Somervell professed to have found the right place, and on the

steep mountain-side they proceeded to build a wall of stones so as to construct a comparatively flat place for one of the Mummery tents.

Norton and I, feebly imitating their efforts, proceeded to erect another, but somehow in our case the walls did not serve. One site after another proved a failure, until at last we found a steep slab of rock, which was at all events in itself secure, and so placed that it was possible to make up the ground at its lower end. Here we ultimately pitched our tent in such a way that the slab took up half the floor-space. A more uncomfortable arrangement could not have been devised, as the inevitable result was that one man slid down on to the other as they lay, squeezing them tightly together, and so increasing almost to the pitch of agony the pain caused by the sharp rocks forming the other part of the floor.

There, however, were the two little tents, perched fifty yards apart, in some sort of fashion for security under the lee of rocks, containing each a double sleeping-bag for warmth in the night. Somervell melted snow with much labour for a perfunctory meal, and soon each bag harboured a pair of men, tightly packed, warming each other, and warmed by the prospect full of hope of a day's mountaineering unlike all others, because we were to start from a point on the earth's surface higher than any before reached.

Perhaps none of us yet realised how much we had already suffered from the cold. Norton's ear was thrice its normal size, and proved a considerable

inconvenience by limiting the number of admissible dispositions for his limbs and mine in those close quarters. Three of my fingers were frost-touched; but luckily the effects of frost-bite are not very serious in the early stages. Far more serious was Morshead's condition. Too late in the day he had put on his sledging suit for protection against the wind; on arriving in camp he was chilled and evidently unwell. We had also to regret the loss of Norton's rucksack; it slipped from his knees during a halt, and must now lie somewhere at the head of the Rongbuk Glacier with its provision of warm things for the night; however, we still had enough among us.

Our chief anxiety was the weather; the west wind dropped in the evening, and the signs pointed to a change. At intervals during the night we noticed that stars were visible; nearer dawn we were disgusted to observe that the ground outside was snow-white. A little later, listening, we heard fine hail falling on the tents, and peering out of the tent door it was possible to make out that the cloud and mist were coming up from the east on a monsoon current.

At 6.30 a.m., with somewhat better signs, we extricated ourselves from our sleeping-bags and set about preparing a meal. Only one thermos flask had turned up overnight, so that our task was cold and long. Another ill-fated rucksack containing provisions slipped from our perch, but miraculously, after bounding a hundred feet or more, stopped on a small ledge. Morshead, heroically exerting himself, recovered it.

At about 8 o'clock we were ready to start. We did

not discuss whether under these conditions we ought to proceed. The snow which had fallen was obviously an impediment, and more was to be expected. But weather of this sort, with all its disadvantages to the mountaineer, may not mean mischief. In high altitudes the snow falls fine, and is not hard driven by the wind. So far as getting up was concerned, there was therefore little fear on this count. None of us, after a long, headachy night, felt at our best. For my part, I hoped that the mere effort at deep breathing in the first few steps of the ascent would string me up to the required efforts, and that we all should be better once we had started.

Disappointment followed at the moment of setting out in hearing bad news from Morshead:

"I think I won't come with you," he said; "I am quite sure I should only keep you back."

On such a question only the man concerned is able to judge. We three [Mallory, Somervell and Norton] went on regretfully without him.

Details of the climbing of the next few hours do not merit exact description. The conditions were naturally unfavourable: fresh snow covered the ledges and concealed loose stones, everywhere obstructive; but the general nature of the ground was not difficult. Despite the geological conjectures of last year, we did not find ourselves climbing chimneys and flakes. There was no sign of granite as we stepped up from ledge to ledge; and these ledges were uniformly tilted disadvantageously.

Plainly the rock is of a stratified sedimentary form,

and as far as can be seen it must have the same general nature up to the summit, varied only by recognisable bands of lighter-coloured quartzite. It was a disappointment that the angle of the ledge was not sufficiently steep to require a more strenuous use of the arms, for the arms help one up, seeming to relieve the monotony of balanced footwork.

It was a matter of slowly pushing up, first regaining the ridge by striking westwards, then following the ridge itself directly towards the great tower capping the north-east shoulder of the mountain. Ultimately the power of pushing up depended upon lung capacity. Lungs governed our speed, making the pace a miserable crawl. From the Alpine point of view our lungs made us pause to admire the view oftener than is correct in the best circles. But our lungs were remarkably alike and went well together. Personally, I contrived a looseness of the muscles by making an easy, deep-drawn breath, and by exercising deep breathing I found myself able to proceed. For a long time we had good hope of reaching the north-east shoulder, but, remembering the long descent to be made and the retarding circumstances of fresh snow, we agreed to turn back not much later than 2 p.m.

We had to consider Morshead left behind at Camp 5. On his account it was desirable to get back to camp with time in hand to reach the North Col on the same day; and in any case it would be an insane risk to climb to the utmost limit of one's strength on Mount Everest and trust to inspiration or brandy

to get one down in safety; for the body does not recover strength in the descent as it does in the Alps.

At 2.15, some time after crossing the head of a conspicuous couloir on the north-east face, we reached, as it were, the head of the rocks, still perhaps five hundred feet below the north-east shoulder of the mountain, and commanding a clear view to the summit. The pace of the party was extremely slow, and there was obvious risk in spending much more time in going up. Greatly as we desired to gain the shoulder—and we were not yet at the end of our powers—the only wisdom was in retreat. The aneroid registered 26,800 feet. We turned to descend with sufficient strength, we believed, for the long task before us.

Away to the westward the ground appeared to be less rocky, and to have more snow. Our obvious plan was to make use of any slow-slope in that direction for our descent. We were, however, very quickly disillusioned, as the "snow-slopes" turned out to be a series of slabs of rock lying treacherously under a fresh white mask of snow. We were obliged to get back to our ridge and follow down along our upward tracks. At 4 o'clock Morshead welcomed us back to our camp of the previous night at twenty-five thousand feet. After gathering what we wanted and leaving our tents, sleeping-sacks, and other items, we proceeded back along the ledge which our track of yesterday had followed. It was difficult to realise immediately how the freshly fallen snow had made of this easy ground a dangerous passage. A nasty

slip occurred, and three men were held only by the rope secured round the leader's single ice-axe. The party proceeded very cautiously after this incident, and it soon became evident that it would be a race with the on-coming darkness.

When we regained the great snow-ridge, no traces of the steps we had cut on the upward journey could be found; we had to repeat the step-cutting. That grim and slow process was observed at about 6 o'clock by Strutt from below in Camp 3. Nor were our difficulties at an end after the passage of this slope. One of the disagreeable facts which differentiates Himalayan expeditions from those in lower mountains is that an exhausted man does not recover his strength quickly as he goes down. Morshead, although climbing very pluckily and making the most tremendous efforts to get his breath, had now arrived at the end of his tether. At best he could only proceed a few steps at a time. Fortunately, it was easy going on the way down to the North Col as we watched the diminishing light. Norton supported Morshead with his shoulder while I was finding the easiest way down, and Somervell acted as rear-guard. Lightning from blue-grey sinister clouds to the west began to flicker after sunset over one of the most amazing mountain views and one which seemed to be full of malice. What sort of wind were we going to find on the Col after dark when our difficulties were due to begin once more?

Our luck was good, or Providence was kind, for, as soon as we had arrived at the starlit crevasses now dimly confronting us and Somervell had pro-

duced the lantern from his rucksack, so calm was the air that even with a Japanese match, after a dozen trials or so, we lit our candle. By its light we groped hither and thither to find our way; there were crevasses concealed beneath the trackless surfaces; happily no one fell through before we reached the edge of a little cliff. Here it was necessary to jump down about fifteen feet into snow, a sufficiently alarming prospect with so dim a light to guide one; but the leap was safely accomplished. One of the fixed ropes, if only we could find it, would now take us down to the terrace where the five tents could just be seen still neatly pitched in a row awaiting our arrival. The rope had become buried by snow and our last candle burnt out. We groped for some time along the edge of the precipice and then began to go down at a steep angle, doubting whether this were the way. Suddenly someone hooked up the rope from under the snow. We knew then that we could reach the tents.

The story of this third expedition will live for ever as a story of heroism. After almost incredible months of endurance three attempts were made by parties of two: (1) Mallory and Geoffrey Bruce reached 26,800 feet; (2) Norton and Somervell turned back from 28,100 feet, Norton blinded and Somervell at the limit of his powers; (3) Mallory and Irvine were last seen pressing upwards at 28,300 feet. It will probably never be known now whether Mallory and Irvine reached the summit. Odell, who went up alone (a prodigious feat) to "Camp VI." and beyond in an attempt to support them, was the last man to see them alive, and he has written an account of what he saw. His is the last chapter in the story of Everest as far as it has yet been written

G. L. Mallory was thirty-seven and A. C. Irvine twenty-two years of age at the time of their death.

THE LAST CLIMB

BY N. E. ODELL

(From the *Alpine Journal*, 1924.)

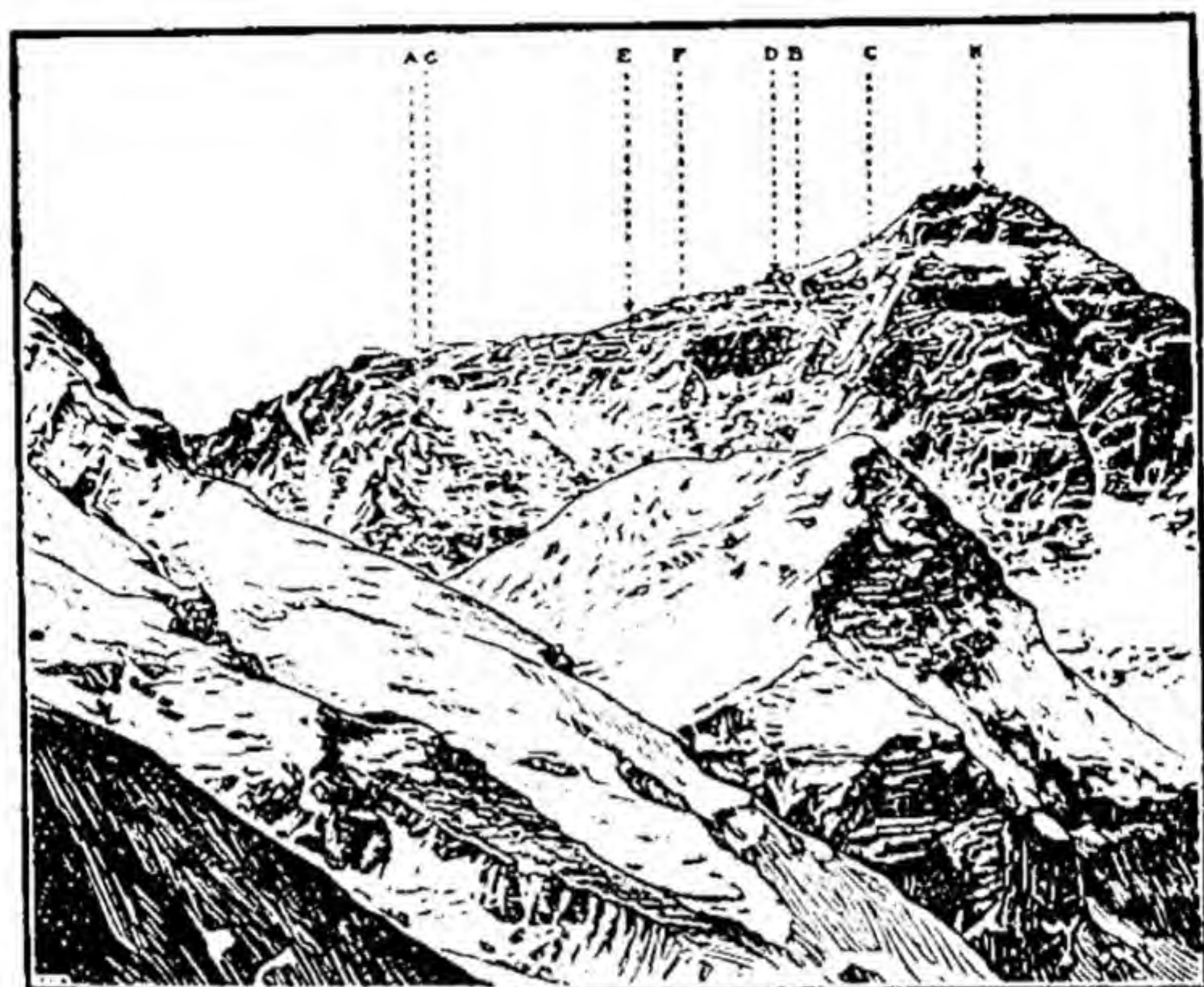
NORTON has described only too modestly his and Somervell's remarkable attempt on the summit and their return to the North Col on 4 June, the same day that Mallory and Irvine had come up from Camp 3. The latter had climbed the two thousand feet from Camp 3 to 4 in the fast time of two and a half hours, evidently in an endeavour to prove to themselves the efficacy of oxygen. June 5 was spent resting at the North Col Camp, Irvine and I meanwhile retesting and putting final touches to the oxygen apparatus.

A few words concerning the nature of Camp 4 and its surroundings may here be applicable. Perched on an ice-ledge in roughly the same position as the camp of 1922, it consisted of four tents. A high wall of ice, rising from the ledge on the western side, gave comforting protection from the prevailing chilling winds from that direction. The ledge was broad enough and long enough to allow comfortable movement all around the tents and leave an ample margin of clean snow for water-supply—a point that concerned me as camp cook. During my period of eleven days' residence there I experienced all kinds of weather conditions, not the least remarkable being two days

when the sun-temperature at midday was 105 degrees F., while the air-temperature at the same time was only 29 degrees. I shall never forget some of the sunrise effects over the distant sea of peaks to the east, Chomolönzo and Makalu standing supreme among them.

In order to reach the actual saddle of the North Col and the foot of the North Ridge of Mount Everest, it had been necessary in 1922 to make a way from the camp-ledge up towards the North Peak, and then back again along the crest of the col. On the occasion of our first reaching the site of Camp 4 on 20 May, Mallory and I had forced a rather complicated route from the southern end of the ledge direct up to the col. This route, though a little treacherous from two doubtful snow-bridges, proved to be negotiable until the end.

At 8.40 on the morning of 6 June, in brilliant weather, Mallory and Irvine left the North Col Camp for Camp 5. They took with them five porters carrying provisions and reserve oxygen cylinders. They used oxygen, and, in the opinion of the porters, travelled well. On June 7, when they were going from Camp 5 to Camp 6, I went up in support to Camp 5 with the one porter that was available. Soon after my arrival Mallory's four porters arrived from Camp 6, bringing me a message which said that they had used but little oxygen to twenty-seven thousand feet, that the weather promised to be perfect for the morrow's climb, and mentioning he was sorry the cooking-stove had rolled down the mountain-side just as they



From the "Alpine Journal"

MOUNT EVEREST

- A. Camp VI.: 26,700 feet.
- B. The point reached by Somervell in 1924.
- C. The point reached by Norton in 1924.
- D. "The Second Step," where Mallory and Irvine were last seen alive.
- E. "The First Step."
- F. The point reached by Finch and Geoffrey Bruce in 1922.
- G. The point reached by Mallory, Norton and Somervell in 1922.
- H. The summit: 29,002 feet.

were leaving Camp 4—an occurrence which meant a cold supper and breakfast for me! As Nema, my porter, was suffering from mountain sickness, I sent him down with the four others to the North Col, and having the tent to myself, and a couple of sleeping-bags, I kept sufficiently warm to sleep well that night.

Next morning broke clear and not unduly cold. After a breakfast of "Force" and a little macaroni and tomatoes, I started my solitary climb to Camp 6, taking with me provisions for that camp in case of need. My plan was to make a rather circuitous route out on to the north face in order to examine the structure of the mountain. Mist soon began to form, and although the wind remained light I found myself immersed now and then in squalls of sleet and light snow. By the glow of light above me I could sometimes see that I was experiencing worse conditions than quite probably Mallory and Irvine were at their higher altitude.

At an altitude of about 25,500 feet I came upon a limestone band which to my joy contained fossils—the first definite forms found on Everest. I might very briefly refer here to the structure of Everest and its bearing on the problem of climbing it. The lower part of the mountain is formed of a variety of gneisses, and on these rests a mass of rocks, mainly altered limestones, which compose the greater part of its upper half. Here and there have been intruded granitoid rocks, but these are relatively little in amount. The general dip of the series is about 30 degrees northward, and since the slope of this face

of the mountain above twenty-five thousand feet is about 40 to 45 degrees, the effect is to make a series of overlapping slabs nearly parallel with the slope and presenting a number of little cliff faces often up to fifty feet in height. Trying enough for upward progress, these slabs are often sprinkled to a varying depth with debris from above, and when to this is added freshly fallen snow, the labour and toil of climbing at these altitudes may perhaps be imagined. It is not the technical difficulty so much as the awkwardness of a slope usually not quite steep enough for the use of one's hands.

At about twenty-six thousand feet I climbed a little crag, which could possibly have been circumvented, but which I decided to tackle direct, more perhaps as a test of my condition than for any other reason. There was, perhaps, a hundred feet of it, and as I reached the top there was a sudden clearing above me and I saw the whole summit ridge and final peak of Everest unveiled. I noticed far away on a snow-slope leading up to the last step but one from the base of the final pyramid a tiny object moving and approaching the rock step. A second object followed, and then the first climbed to the top of the step. As I stood intently watching this dramatic appearance, the scene became enveloped in cloud, and I could not actually be certain that I saw the second figure join the first. I was surprised, above all, to see them so late as this, namely 12.50, at a point that, according to Mallory's schedule, should have been reached by 10 a.m. at latest. I could see that they

were moving expeditiously, as if endeavouring to make up for lost time. True they were moving one at a time over what was apparently but moderately difficult ground, but one cannot definitely conclude from this that they were roped—an important consideration in any estimate of what befell them. I had seen that there was a considerable quantity of new snow covering some of the upper rocks near the summit ridge, and this may well have caused delay in the ascent. Burdened as they undoubtedly were with the oxygen apparatus, these snow-covered, debris-sprinkled slabs may have given much trouble. The oxygen apparatus itself may have needed repair or readjustment either before or after they left Camp 6, and so have delayed them. Or both these factors may have been operative.

I continued my way up to Camp 6, and on arrival there, about 2 o'clock, a rather more severe blizzard set in and the wind increased. After a short rest I realised it was just possible that, balked by earlier bad weather higher up, Mallory and Irvine might be returning, and the concealed position of Camp 6 would be almost impossible to discover in the blizzard. I remembered also that Mallory had told me in his note that he had left his compass at Camp 5, and asked me to retrieve it. So I went out in the direction of the summit, and having scrambled up about two hundred feet and yodelled and whistled meanwhile, in case they happened to be within hearing, I then took shelter for a while behind a rock from the driving sleet. After about an hour's wait, realising that the chances were

altogether against their being within call, I found my way back to the tent. As I reached it the storm, which had lasted not more than two hours, blew over, and the whole north face of the mountain became bathed in sunshine. The upper crags were visible, but I could see no signs of the party. The little tent at Camp 6 was only just large enough for two, and if I had remained and they had returned, one of us would have had to sleep outside in the open—an altogether hazardous expedient. But apart from this, Mallory had particularly requested me in his last note to return to the North Col, as he specially wished to reach there himself after their climb. Leaving Camp 6, therefore, about 4.30, and going down the North Ridge in quick time, I took to the hard snow near Camp 5 and glissaded down to the North Col, reaching the camp at 6.45. That night Hazard's brew of Maggi soup, made from a mixture of at least six varieties, went down really well! I was surprised, though, to find that I was not suffering from thirst—that bugbear of Everest—to anything like the extent I had expected.

We watched till late that night for some signs of Mallory and Irvine's return, or even an indication by flare of distress. Next morning we scrutinised through field-glasses the tiny tents of Camps 5 and 6, far up above us, in case they had returned late and had not yet started down. But no movement at all could be seen. At noon I decided to go up to Camp 5 and on to Camp 6 next day in search, and I arranged a code of signals with Hazard, who remained at the

North Col. Two porters came with me and stayed the night at Camp 5, but in the morning I had to send them back to the North Col on account of indisposition. It was a bitterly cold night, and we slept little, if at all. Using oxygen, I started off from Camp 5, and when within an hour or so of Camp 6 I came to the conclusion that I was deriving but little benefit from the oxygen, which I had only been taking in moderate quantities from the single cylinder that I carried. I switched it off, and experienced none of the feelings of collapse and faintness that one had been led to believe ought to result. On reaching the tent at Camp 6 I found everything as I had left it: the tent had obviously not been touched since I was there two days previously. I dumped the oxygen apparatus and went in search up along the probable route that Mallory and Irvine had taken. There was a bitterly cold west wind, and now and then I had to take shelter behind rocks to restore warmth. After a couple of hours' search I realised that the chances of finding the missing ones were indeed small on such a vast expanse of crags and broken slabs, and that for any more extensive search towards the final pyramid a further party would have to be organised. I returned only too reluctantly to the tent, and then with considerable exertion dragged the two sleeping-bags up to a precipitous snow patch plastered on the little crag above the tent. With these sleeping-bags placed against the snow I had arranged with Hazard to signal down to the North Col Camp the results of my search. It needed all my efforts to cut steps out

over the snow-slope and then fix the sleeping-bags in position, so boisterous was the wind. But fortunately the signal was seen four thousand feet below, though the answering signal I could not make out. Closing up the tent and leaving its contents as my friends had left them, I glanced up at the mighty summit above me. It seemed to look down with cold indifference on me, mere puny man, and howl derision in wind-gusts at my petition to yield up its secret, this mystery of my friends. If it were indeed the sacred ground of Chomolungma, Goddess Mother of the Mountains, had we violated it?—was I now violating it? And yet, as I gazed again, there seemed to be something alluring in that towering presence. I was almost fascinated. I realised that no mere mountaineer alone could but be fascinated; that he who approaches close must ever be led on and, oblivious of all obstacles, seek to reach that most sacred and highest place of all. It seemed that my friends must have been thus enchanted also: for why else should they tarry? In an effort to suppress my feelings, I turned my gaze downwards to the North Col far below, and I remembered that other of my companions would be anxiously awaiting my return, eager to hear what tidings I carried. Alone and in meditation I slowly commenced my long descent. But it was no place for silent contemplation, for, buffeted by storm-blasts that seemed to pierce one through, it needed all one's attention and calculation to negotiate safely the exposed slabs of the ridge and prevent a slip on their debris-sprinkled surfaces. I

quicken my pace lower down, but at times found it necessary to seek protection from the biting gale behind rocks and reassure myself that no symptoms of frost-bite were imminent. Hazard had seen me coming and sent his one remaining Sherpa to meet and welcome me at the foot of the ridge. Arrived at the North Col Camp, I was pleased to find a note from Norton and to discover that I had anticipated his wishes that I should return to Camp 4 and not prolong my search on the mountain, seeing that the monsoon seemed likely to break at any moment. Next day Hazard, the porter and myself, leaving the tents standing, evacuated the North Col Camp and went down in good weather to Camp 3, and later in the day with Hingston and Shebbeare to Camp 2, reaching the Base Camp on the 12th.

I have already mentioned the possible reasons why Mallory and Irvine were so late in reaching the point at which they were last seen—namely an altitude which Hazard later determined by theodolite to be about 28,230 feet—and I must now very briefly speculate on the probable causes of their failure to return. They had about eight hundred feet of altitude to surmount to reach the top, and, provided no particularly difficult obstacle presented itself on the final pyramid, they should have got there about 3 to 3.30. This would be three or four hours late on Mallory's schedule, and hence they would find it almost impossible to reach Camp 6 before nightfall, allowing five or six hours for the return. But at the same time it must be remembered there was a moon,

thought it rose rather late, and that evening it was fine and the mountain clear of mist, as far as could be seen. In spite of this they may have missed the way and failed to find Camp 6, and in their overwrought condition sought shelter till daylight—a danger that Mallory, experienced mountaineer that he was, would be only too well aware of, but find himself powerless to resist: sleep at that altitude and in that degree of cold would almost certainly prove fatal.

The other possibility is that they met their death by falling. This implies that they were roped together, which need not necessarily be inferred from their observed movements when last seen. It is difficult for one who knew the skill and experience of George Mallory on all kinds and conditions of mountain ground to believe that he fell. Of Sandy Irvine it can be said that, though altogether less experienced than Mallory, he had shown himself to be a natural adept and able to move safely and easily on rock and ice. Such had been my experience of him in Spitzbergen, in Norway, and on our home mountains. They were hampered, of course, by the oxygen apparatus—a very serious load for climbing with, as Mallory had mentioned in his last note to me. But could such a pair fall, and where, technically, the climbing appeared so easy? Experts nevertheless, I fear to remind you, have done so, under stress of circumstances or exhaustion.

It has been suggested that the oxygen apparatus failed and thereby rendered them powerless to return. I cannot accept the validity of this argument; for,

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